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TOM MARCHMONT.

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TOM MARCHMONT.

CHAPTER I.

THE UNPROMISING ONE OF THE FAMILY.

SITUATED in the centre of Great Huntingdonshire, and about six miles away from the old-fashioned town of Barking, there stands a noble residence, called Granby Hall. For centuries this place had been owned by a family of the name of Marchmont. The house had been erected at a period when the estate produced an income which enabled its owners to defray the numerous expenses attendant on keeping up so fine a place without embarrassment, but times had changed since then. The Marchmonts had always been famous for their pack of hounds—the finest to be met with in this very sporting county. The hounds brought horses, and the horses riders, with all the endless expenses which these adjuncts involve. There was an ambition in each successive representative of the house to maintain the family honour, which,

it seemed, could only be done through the instrumentality of these hounds and horses. In consequence, the family income began gradually to diminish, while the pack of hounds retained its original proportions, and with them its claims to general fame.

Some sixty years ago, Sir Charles Marchmont was owner of the place and title—a title which had belonged to the family ever since Baronets were first created. Like his predecessors, Sir Charles was proud of his pedigree, proud of his place, and proud of his pack of hounds. Of purse-pride he could have none, for on his father's death he found himself with all the fancied duties required of him by his position, to be one of the poorest of men. Lady Marchmont loved the gay world almost as well as her husband loved the pleasures of the chase. The education of their two children, a son and a daughter, served much to increase the annual expenditure, and so when Christmas time had passed and the yearly bills had all been paid, Sir Charles' purse was generally a good deal lighter than that of the steward who managed his extensive estates.

A younger brother of the Baronet's had been put into the church on account of the family living, though having little taste for his profession. He had married a woman of birth but without money, and they too found themselves poor for the position they thought themselves entitled to hold. The struggle they made to maintain it was worthy of

a nobler cause, and it absorbed them quite, to the exclusion of every higher aim. When, therefore, five years after the birth of their second son, a third came into the world, the new arrival was merely looked upon as a fresh source of expense, and as an encumbrance which they would have gladly done without. However, they felt as regarded all three, that being the sons of Mr. and Lady Julia Marchmont, a fitting education must be given them in order that they might never shame the position to which they were born.

The atmosphere of their home being intensely worldly, it had on the elder ones the effect which might have been anticipated. They possessed the manners and the address of gentlemen—they could ride and they could shoot. They had also acquired that kind of knowledge when at school, which would always save them from the dire disgrace of being looked upon as unconversant with the ways of society when in it. But with all these outward advantages their hearts within seemed to be withering away; indeed, it is probable they would have been inclined to laugh at the person who could have been simple enough to accuse them of having any.

When advanced towards manhood their father had succeeded in getting his two eldest sons commissions in the army, and now he had only Charles to dispose of. Charles possessed by nature a warm heart and generous impulses. He had felt from his earliest years a want which nothing at

home had ever yet supplied him with—the want of human sympathy and affection. He had been an unwelcome arrival, and his warmer feelings and stronger impulses made him more difficult to manage than his elder brothers. He was deemed the unpromising one of the family, and in spite of this he was destined for the church. Charles cordially disliked the idea. His home observations led him to consider religion as all humbug, and he hated humbug. He was fond too of an out-of-doors life, and the idea of having to write two sermons a week, and of undergoing previously the hard work which was to lead to such a consummation, terrified him.

When Charles was sixteen his mother died, and it hardly could have been said that he felt her loss. A year afterwards he followed his father to the grave. This last event did really prove a misfortune, for it deprived Charles of a home. It was found that Mr. Marchmont had not put by a penny, and so the poor fellow became entirely dependent on an uncle, who took care to make him feel that he would be glad in any way to get rid of him. The frigid state kept up by the Baronet and his lady wearied Charles, while he felt most keenly alive to the fact that he was an unwelcome guest. About a month therefore after his father's death, and while his uncle was making arrangements for sending him to college in some menial capacity, Charles took the direction of his affairs into his own hands, ran away and enlisted as a

common sailor. His uncle and his brothers made a few faint efforts at discovering where he was gone, and they were not very sorry at failing in their endeavours.

The ship Charley had joined was going to China, and so he took leave of his native land for some years. His new way of life disappointed him terribly. He had rushed into it with that thoughtless impatience which marked his character, and without having any ideas as to an Ocean life, save what his own active and glowing imagination had inspired him with. He had sought for freedom but he had found bondage, and his spirit chafed under it. He had the instincts of a gentleman, and these instincts were continually outraged. He was one who could not patiently bear to be miserable, and so he grew reckless of life. If there were any particular deed of daring to be done, Charley was the one to do it, and it became a very small matter to him whether the action brought death with it or not. He outlived, however, all the hazards which a bold and suffering spirit led him to encounter, and at the end of four years he again found himself on his native shore.

Charley was a fine, handsome fellow, and looked in every way superior to the dress he wore. The ship had come into harbour at Plymouth, and soon after his arrival Charley was sauntering along High-street, not very well knowing what to do with his time. Passing a bookseller's shop he turned into it, to try if he could find a readable book with

which to while away an hour or two. On entering, the woman of the shop looked hard at him.

"Have I," she at last exclaimed, "the pleasure of speaking to Sir Charles Marchmont's nephew?"

Charles coloured and then laughed.

"To no less a person," was his answer, making a sailor's bow as he spoke. "And how long have you left my aunt's service," he continued, for he had by this time recognized his interlocutor as being Lady Marchmont's late housekeeper.

"About two years ago," was Mrs. Morgan's reply. "Have you heard of her Ladyship recently?" she continued, "I'm told as the family is gone abroad."

"Are they!" said Charles, "I have not had the honour of hearing from my worthy relatives since I left them some four years ago, and believing as I do that they care about as much for me as I do for them, I don't suppose we are ever likely to give ourselves much trouble concerning one another!"

"Well," said Mrs. Morgan, "I don't think as they've a right to expect much gratitude from you."—"And what's more, they won't want it if I'll only let them alone," observed Charles interrupting her.

"It seems a pity though," resumed Mrs. Morgan in a tone of regret, and casting a significant glance at his dress, "for a fine young man like you to have lowered himself as you have done—and such a good chance as you had of getting the family living, if you'd only bided your time."

"Much chance I had of that!" said Charles "As if the fellow they put in was going to die off as soon as I wanted him to."

"But I'm sure, Master Charles," said Mrs. Morgan, looking in his face, "you can't be happy as you are."

"Happy!" said Charles bitterly, "who is? Not I, for a certainty, and its what I don't expect to be. However, I would bear being in a worse position sooner than I would apply for help to that affectionate uncle of mine!"

"Well, Mr. Charles," said Mrs. Morgan in a voice of regretful sympathy, "you always was a little bit too proud and independent with them as was above ye, and that ain't the way to get on in this world. I always said though, as you had the best heart of any of them, and I shall be proud to show you any civility as is in my power. May I ask how long you've been at Plymouth?—La! Morgan will be so glad to see ye!—You remember Morgan at the Hall? Well, his brother fell into bad health, so he offered him the business for a consideration. He and I had put by a little money, and as we was both tired of service we made an arrangement as we'd marry and set up together. He'll be pleased to see you Master Charles, for you always was a favourite of his."

The good woman had rambled on without waiting for a reply to her question. She now put it to Charles again, and on being told that he had so recently arrived,—

"Only last Thursday!" she exclaimed. "Then may-be

you've not made many friends here as yet. We shall always be pleased to see you, Mr. Charles, whenever you've a mind to come. My husband and I have made some money out of your family, and we'd feel bound to show you any kindness as we could. Morgan is out now, but he'll be in at one o'clock. If you don't object to a plain dinner we shall be very pleased to see you at that hour. We've no one with us except Nancy Cox. You'll remember her mother, Master Charles; she was laundress at the Court."

"What old Thomas's wife?" enquired Charles. "Is the old man still alive?"

"He died soon after you left, Master Charles. He took it greatly to heart, your leaving them all as you did. He talked about you when he was a dying, and of your once bringing him a bottle of wine when he was ill. He knew, he said, as 'twas got with your own money, and he dwelt upon it more than you'd 'a' thought. Nancy's a poor thing, and we've got her here for a bit on account of her health. If you'll excuse the company Master Charles———"

"Excuse the company!" Charley exclaimed, "I hope I may never get into worse! I shall be delighted to come. Morgan was always fond of a story, and I've got a lot to tell him. I'll bring him some strange birds too another day, to add to his collection. Good-bye till one,"—and Charles was off.

"Poor fellow!" thought Mrs. Morgan to herself, while watching the young sailor's light and springy step as he walked down the street, "he looks as if he were made for better fortune than he've got."

The bookseller was overwhelmed with astonishment on his return home at his wife's intelligence. "Well to be sure," he exclaimed, "I've never heard anything stranger than that in all my life." He was glad, and he was sorry too. Master Charles was too much of a gentleman to be fit for the calling he had adopted. He wished he could do something for him. He wished Sir Charles were in England. He would write to him if he were. For very shame he'd never let his nephew be on board ship as a common sailor if he knew it.

"Sir Charles is a man," said his wife, "who would never care much where his nephew might be, as long as he was out of his sight and hearing. Mr. Charles don't look for any help from *him*. He told me as much, and believe it, he couldn't have looked more pleased when I asked him to come and dine here, if you'd been Admiral of the Port!"

"Oh, I always thought well of Master Charles," observed John Morgan, whose pride had been evidently a little flattered by his wife's last words. "His was a fine nature spoilt," he continued, "and I'd do more for him than I'd do for most of them as I knows."

The expected guest was five minutes before his time, and

on meeting his old acquaintance he forgot his present calling, and greeted the ex-butler much as he would have done had he still been looked upon generally as Sir Charles Marchmont's nephew. The manner was reciprocal, Mr. Morgan's politeness not allowing him to sit down till begged to do so by his visitor.

Charles had always been remarkably good company when he thought fit, and the familiar faces, and the hearty welcome accorded him, had put him into unusually good spirits. His stories seemed gradually to have the effect of widening his host's face, which the cares of business had, during the last two years, considerably lengthened.

Nancy Cox was quite overwhelmed by the honour of sitting at dinner facing Sir Charles's nephew, and she had not a word to say. She was a timid, gentle girl of seventeen, the only daughter of a widowed mother who, since she had left Granby Hall, had been earning a maintenance as washerwoman in the village of Waltham, some twelve or thirteen miles from thence. Thomas and Mary Cox had been prudent people, and, though engaged when young, they had not married until late in life, from a fear that they might not be able to support a family sooner. Nancy had been, as it were, the daughter of their old age, and when her husband died the widow clung to her one child with no ordinary affection.

Charles, as he gave an occasional glance at her across the

table, felt a growing admiration for her soft, hazel eyes, and her modest, gentle look, while he was struck with that air of refinement which delicate health, united to a reflective cast of mind, had imparted to her countenance. His words were, however, all addressed to his host and hostess, who never for a moment supposed—as on leaving he readily accepted an invitation for the next day—that there was anyone among the company assembled besides themselves whom he would be glad again to see.

CHAPTER II.

WOOED AND WON.

CHARLES's temperament made him rapid in all his decisions, and after two or three more visits to the booksellers, he had quite made up his mind that Nancy was the girl for him, and that he could never care for any other. This decision being come to, he did not keep it to himself very long. By way of commencement to his love-making he purchased in the shop a splendidly-bound volume of Byron's Poems, not without considerable remonstrance on the part of Mrs. Morgan at this piece of extravagance, though the good woman had not a notion wherefore the purchase was made.

"I left my stick in your little parlour last night," he observed, as Mrs. Morgan handed to him the parcel, "I'll just go in and get it."

Still Mrs. Morgan did not see through Charles's very open-handed manœuvres.

Nancy was most conveniently sitting in the parlour, where she was bestowing much attention on the repair of her hostess's best collar. Charles sat down beside her with determination in his manner, undid the parcel, and gave her the

book. Nancy's blush always came readily, and now it quite suffused her face.

"Oh! Mr. Marchmont," she exclaimed, "you can't really mean this handsome book for me."

"Upon my soul I do," said Charles, "but I want something from you in return. I love you, Nancy, and if you'll consent to be my wife I'll try and become a steadier and a better man."

For the honour of the family, Mrs. Morgan liked to have it supposed that it was Charles's wildness that had brought him to his present condition, and he guessed rightly that Nancy had been well primed with this idea.

She was not so ready with her reply as he had been with his question. She said nothing, but burst into tears. Nevertheless the feeling came over her all at once that she *could* love the careless stranger as dearly as he had just told her that he loved her.

"Silence implies consent," said Charles, and without further demur he kissed Nancy by way of giving assurance to his words.

"No," said Nancy, a little recovered from her first surprise, "I could not marry you—you are a gentleman born and bred, and I am nothing but a poor girl."

"Not much poorer than myself," said Charley, "and as for gentility, it never yet did me any good, and never will, and I don't care a ——" he was going to utter an oath, but he

restrained himself. "Nancy," he continued, as he threw his arm round her waist, "I've lost my position, and I shall never recover it again. If you'll have me I'll do my best to become a good man—if not—I'll blow my brains out—for there's nothing in life besides yourself that I care to live for."

"Hush! Mr. Marchmont," said Nancy, shocked at his daring words, while she was still held in the firm grasp from which she had been trying to extricate herself. "I can't bear," she murmured, "to hear you talk so. I'd marry you, and gladly, if it were right, and if I thought I could make you happier."

"You can, you can," cried Charles. "It's all settled, and I'll go at once and tell Mrs. Morgan."

"Stop, stop," said Nancy, frightened at his impetuosity, and at the idea of what her hostess might say, "please wait a little, Mr. Marchmont."

"Not an instant," was the reply, and Mrs. Morgan was called in to be a witness to what Charles chose to consider an engagement.

The good woman was as astonished as she was displeased. She liked Nancy, but not nearly well enough to approve of her marrying the nephew of the Baronet, her former master. She had, indeed, far higher views for Mr. Charles, and had been indulging in romantic visions with regard to his restoration to his former position through some agency as yet unknown.

Nancy looked timidly into Mrs. Morgan's face to see how she would take the announcement, while Charles was satisfied with decisively informing her of the fact.

"Well, I never saw such a young gentleman as you," she exclaimed, as she gave him a tender look of reproach, "and as for you, Nancy," she added with less forbearance, and with a much sterner look, "I could'nt have believed as you'd have given your consent to so unsuitable a proposal!"

"I said no," stammered Nancy; and Charles allowed her no time to explain things further.

"Nancy refused me at first," he said, "but I swore I'd blow my brains out, and now I've got her consent, and I won't let her retract it."

"Well," said Mrs. Morgan, in a tone of intense vexation, "I hope it won't be thought as I and Morgan have had anything to do with it. I'd have been long enough before I'd have asked Nancy here if I could have known what was a going to come of it. It's beneath you, Mr. Charles, to marry the daughter of your aunt's laundress, and I don't mind who I say it to."

"Perhaps Nancy's mother would think it indifferent luck," retorted Charles, "that would lead her daughter into marrying a poor sailor like me."

"Oh, fie!" exclaimed Mrs. Morgan, "how you do talk!"

"Well, Nancy," said Charles, with the air and manner of an accepted lover, "you must write to your mother, and ask

for her consent to spare you to me, and the sooner she can give you up the better."

"Ah! Mr. Charles," said Mrs. Morgan in a tone of pitying reproach, "you was one as would always have your own way, and I can't, of course, presume to dictate to you. However, I think it will best, and Nancy will, I am sure, think the same, that you don't come here again till she gets her mother's reply."

"Then that will not be till the day after to-morrow," said Charles. "Now you won't be putting in a word against it," he added, placing his hand coaxingly on Mrs. Morgan's shoulder; "I'll make Nancy a good husband, and there's no one who can reasonably object to my marrying whom I please."

With a parting smile to Nancy, and a warm shake of his older friend's hand, Charley walked away wishing, as he did so, that he could annihilate the next forty-eight hours, and know at once whether he was to have the treasure that he sought. On his departure, Mrs. Morgan, assuming great dignity and severity of manner, thus addressed Nancy:—

"I'm sorry, very sorry as all this has happened. I'll not believe it of you, Nancy, as you could have given Mr. Marchmont any actual encouragement to act as he have done, but I blame you much for allowing him for a moment to suppose as you could sanction his folly. Your mother has, I am sure, a great deal too much respect for her betters not

to think just as I do, and I feel as 'tis my duty to send you back to her at once. I'll write to her so as she may not be taken by surprise, and you must be ready to start by the coach at ten to-morrow morning."

Nancy had a sort of feeling that Mrs. Morgan was in the right, and unhesitatingly assented to the proposal.

"I will go, then, and pack up my clothes at once," she said, making a tremendous effort to speak cheerfully, and then, when she had fairly shut herself into her room, she sat upon the box she had gone up to fill, and indulged herself in a hearty cry. She had been happy and contented an hour ago, and now her peace of mind seemed to have departed. After a time she commenced packing up her things, applied some cold water to her eyes, and then went down to the family dinner. Mrs. Morgan thought it best to make no further allusion to the subject, while her manner towards Nancy had become unusually kind and gentle. Morgan had been so well drilled by his wife that his observations were confined to the poorness of Nancy's appetite. He hoped, he said, that it would return when she got home, or her mother would think the sea air had been of no good to her after all. Poor Nancy's eyes swam with tears as her host was speaking, but she managed to conceal her emotion.

"Mother," she said, "is so accustomed to see me eat but little dinner, that she won't think much about my appetite failing me once in a way," and she gave the bookseller a

pleasant smile as she spoke. Though pleasant, it looked to him as if it were just going to change into tears, and he felt sorry for Nancy. He knew it would be treason to say such a thing, but he thought as he looked at her that worse luck might befall Mr. Charles than he would get by marrying Molly Cox's pretty daughter.

Mrs. Morgan was so far pleased with Nancy's behaviour as to be induced to speak very kindly of her in her letter to her mother. Nancy had slept over her disappointment, and though she woke up in a frame of mind less happy than she had done on the previous morning, yet she had a feeling that it was her duty to banish Mr. Marchmont for ever from her thoughts, a feeling which she resolved to act upon. A bright sun and a pleasant, balmy atmosphere helped her to chase away melancholy; and when the coach stopped at Mrs. Cox's garden gate, and she caught sight of the motherly face, with a welcome beaming from every feature, the little sore in Nancy's heart seemed entirely to be healed, and she bid fair to be again what she had been hitherto—the cheerful companion of a widowed mother.

Mrs. Morgan had requested Molly Cox to let her hear of her daughter's safe return, and not long after the arrival of the expected letter, Charley walked into the bookseller's house.

“Where is Nancy?” was his first question.

“At home,” was the reply, and Mrs. Morgan put the letter

she had just received into Charles's hand. It contained Mrs. Cox's grateful thanks, and many expressions of pleasure at having her dear girl home again. Charles's countenance fell.

"Then you sent Nancy home!" was his first exclamation.

"I did," was the reply, "for I thought it best for all parties that she should go."

"Well, there is nothing to hinder me from following her," said Charles promptly. "I hope when I see you next I shall be a married man"—and he walked away without giving Mrs. Morgan time for expostulation.

Nancy and her mother were at their frugal five o'clock tea, when a second time the coach stopped at the garden-gate, and in an instant an impetuous knock was heard at the cottage-door. Nancy turned pale, and then red, and her heart beat so hard that she fancied her mother must have heard it. In a moment Charley was by Nancy's side.

"I am come here," he said, addressing himself to Mrs. Cox, "to ask you for your daughter. I love her with all my heart and soul, and I have reason to think I might persuade her to care for me. You'll not refuse my request, I feel assured"—and Charley waited anxiously for an answer.

Molly was, like her daughter, not very ready of speech, and her astonishment at this entirely unexpected visit seemed quite to take her breath away. Silence was again construed by Charley into assent, and putting his arm round Nancy's

waist, he protested that she was his, and that nothing now should separate them. Molly's respect for her betters seemed to incapacitate her from contradicting the assertion ; though, when she had recovered from her first surprise, she made some feeble efforts towards hindering Charley's suit. However, his earnestness proved in the end more than a match for her weak powers of resistance. He won her heart with his pleasant manner, convinced her understanding by his logic, and succeeding in persuading her that there was nothing for it now but to give her consent.

It was on a January day, in the year 1813, that the marriage was solemnized. Not till later in that same year was the Act passed for the proper registry of marriages, and Nancy's union with her impetuous lover was in every respect hastily got through. Molly Cox was very anxious that Charley's parentage should not be generally known, and so it was a relief to her mind when, on his merely giving his name and former occupation, Mr. Gale seemed satisfied therewith, and asked no further questions.

From the ardent lover, Charles now changed into the devoted husband. His wife's feeling for him amounted almost to idolatry, and for a time there was not in the whole world a happier woman than Nancy. Charley, too, was feeling happy for the first time in his life. He had won the earnest and unselfish love of a woman, and his late hardships and rough companionship made Molly's cottage appear to him

a kind of earthly Paradise. Mrs. Cox was a humble-minded, cheerful, and in most respects a sensible woman, though perhaps some of our readers will be disposed to think that she failed a little in wisdom when she allowed the Baronet's wild and reckless nephew to marry her daughter.

CHAPTER III.

THE BARONET'S LETTER.

UNEQUAL marriages often prove unfortunate ones. However, it did not seem as if the general rule was going to hold good in this particular instance. Charles and Nancy were, as we have said, positively happy, far happier perhaps than some, the outward circumstances of whose union might appear a good deal more propitious. In spite of the difference in birth and education, there was a certain similarity in the two minds which kept them united, while Nancy's gentle and reflective disposition was well adapted to sooth and tame her husband's more fiery and impulsive temperament. They had each a natural refinement, they both needed affection, while they would each have equally shunned a mean or an ungenerous act. The little cottage bore testimony to the power which taste possesses of producing beauty without the assistance of wealth, and no one could have detected any evidence of vulgarity in Molly's humble abode.

Mrs. Cox and her daughter knew their station and they quietly kept in it, while Charley made himself entirely one with them. He had on landing received about four hundred

pounds, and now he was anxious to find some employment which might provide him and his wife with a respectable maintenance, independently of what he had earned by his former services. He had written to his friend the bookseller to announce his marriage, and he had at the same time asked if he could help him to some occupation more suitable to his taste and bringing up than the one he had just quitted. Mr. Morgan had sent him a kind letter in reply, wishing both him and Nancy happiness, and promising to do what he could for him. "He came in the way of a good many people," he said, "and he thought it not unlikely that in time he might hear of something desirable." Charley showed an amount of patience which his best friends would hardly have given him credit for, while waiting for employment, though now and then his heart yearned for something like his former position in life. In the mean time he occupied himself a good deal in the garden, and as the year advanced he got plenty of employment elsewhere.

There was a river running near the town, celebrated for its beauty, and during the summer months it was thronged with parties of pleasure. It was soon found out that Charley knew how to use an oar. His services were consequently in great request, while he received for them the most liberal payment. His good address and manner, as well as his good looks, were all in his favour, and the young ladies became ecstatic in their praises of our hero. His wife was in this

way brought into notice, and Charles would sometimes get a little tired of the patronising visits they received. No one however had any idea who he really was. Mrs. Cox was a timid woman, and though thirteen miles removed from Granby Hall, yet the pride of its inmates still seemed to overawe her. Our hero would have scorned to boast of a relationship with those from whom he had received nothing but coldness and indifference, and so it was never breathed to a living soul who were Charley's belongings.

Our hero had another accomplishment which enabled him, as the year wore on, to earn an honest penny. He had a natural talent for drawing, and this talent had been cultivated at school. He had made many sketches when abroad, and now that he had leisure he took to the pursuit again. Having made himself so general a favourite his sketches began to be in request, and it is probable that he got better paid for his work than many a more laborious artist.

As the winter advanced two Miss Bridgets, middle-aged ladies, were on a visit to Mrs. Hodges, the doctor's wife. Their own residence was close to Granby Hall, to which place the Baronet and his lady had recently returned. Lady Marchmont was anxious to get up a Bazaar, the proceeds of which were to help towards the repair of the church, and the Miss Bridgets were very energetic in the cause. They had been working very hard themselves in the way of making pin-cushions, needle-books and mats—articles of such general

manufacture that their production generally far out-strips their sale. Mr. Grey, the clergyman, knew Nancy well, and he felt an interest in Charles. One day, therefore, when he was calling on these ladies he asked them whether a few rough sketches would be acceptable, as he would be very glad to get some employment for a young man he knew, who seemed to have considerable talent as an artist. The two ladies were delighted at the idea, and they lost no time in calling at the cottage for the purpose of looking at Charles's sketches, and deciding which of them they would like to get copies of. This point being settled they entered into conversation with our hero. They were women of inquiring minds, and liked to know all about everybody. When had he returned home—how long had he been at Waltham—was he a native of the place—these were questions that followed one another thick and fast. Charles's answers were civil but concise, and after a time the two ladies took their leave. They called at Mr. Grey's on their way back, where they expressed much astonishment at Charles's appearance and manner, so unlike that of a low-born man. Mr. Grey had been struck with the same thing, but he had never been at the trouble of drawing inferences therefrom. There had been a sudden disappearance in the Baronet's family four or five years previously, and though the Miss Bridgets had not at that time been personally acquainted with Sir Charles and her Ladyship, yet the circumstances

had come to their ears. Could this young Marchmont be the missing member? Mrs. Cox was known to have been formerly laundress at Granby Hall, and these two facts enabled the Miss Bridgets to arrive nearer at the truth than ladies always do when they jump at conclusions. They paid the cottage a second visit, and began talking to Mrs. Cox about her former master “whom,” said they, “we rejoice in having among us once more.”

This announcement made the heart of their auditress take as great a leap as it probably would have done had she perceived Sir Charles’s carriage standing at her door, and he himself in the act of alighting for the purpose of demanding of her his nephew. The Miss Bridgets took notice of the involuntary start which their announcement had occasioned; then fixing their keen eyes on Charles they observed that his colour was heightened, and they were struck at the moment with a sort of resemblance which did really exist between him and his uncle. They at once settled that Charles must be the missing member of the family, and on leaving the cottage they, with the same breath, communicated to each other their thoughts. They were ambitious of increasing their acquaintance with the family at the Hall; and, being prudent women, they decided on keeping the discovery for the present strictly to themselves. On their return home they lost no time in making the “proper person” aware of the fact, and of their own previous reticence. They

received much commendation from Sir Charles for their kind and considerate way of acting, and they were at the same time given to understand it would be thought a great additional kindness if they never again in any way alluded to the subject. They faithfully promised a compliance with these wishes. The Baronet and his lady thought it incumbent on them for the future to treat the Miss Bridgets with more than ordinary civility; and the latter had little idea of the joy it occasioned their much valued acquaintances at the Hall when, in the course of a twelvemonth, circumstances obliged those sharp-sighted ladies to remove to a more distant locality.

After receiving the news which the Miss Bridget's had been so eager to communicate to him, the Baronet's feelings towards his nephew were none of the most amiable, and he talked the matter over with his wife very seriously.

"I feel it to be a duty I owe myself," he said, "that I should take some steps towards getting rid of this annoyance."

"I quite think as you do," said her Ladyship with equal seriousness.

"One does not like the idea of paying people for such gross ingratitude," rejoined Sir Charles, "but I see no way of getting out of the difficulty unless it is with a bribe."

"I think," said her Ladyship, who was sensitive on the subject of any unusual outlay of Bank notes, "I think if you were to write a note of remonstrance to Molly Cox,

and let her see clearly what you think of her conduct, it might be a sufficient inducement to her to move further off. She used to have a proper respect for her betters, and she probably has it still unless Charles has succeeded in quite demoralising her."

"I think," said the Baronet, as he stood in a pondering attitude, with his arms behind him and his back to the fire. "I think it will be as well to send a ten-pound-note with the remonstrance, to make sure of its effect."

"But how if she does not consent?" said her Ladyship. "She would hardly dare to refuse," was Sir Charles's reply, his colour mounting at the thought, "I shall write her a strong letter, and I will go and set about it at once." The Baronet's letter was written and sent, and considerable trepidation was betrayed by Mrs. Cox when she received and read it on the following morning. The letter was as follows:—

Mary Cox, her Ladyship and myself have been not a little astonished at hearing of your most extraordinary proceedings. That you should ever have permitted a daughter of yours to marry so near a connection of mine was bad enough; but to harbour him and his wife so close to my own residence, betrays an amount of ingratitude on your part which I could hardly have given you credit for. I should consider it useless the attempt to appeal to Charles's better feelings, for I have always known that he possesses none. But I cannot doubt that this remonstrance, coming as it does from one to whom you have during so many years of your life been indebted for a respectable maintenance, will have the desired effect; and that you will feel it to be far better for you and yours, as well as for ourselves, that you should remove to some more

distant place. I send you a ten-pound note in order that you may be amply provided with means for defraying the expenses attendant on a change of residence, and in the full assurance of an immediate compliance with my wishes.

I am yours,

CHARLES MARCHMONT.

Granby Hall, Jan. 1814.

Molly's first idea was to go away at once.

"You must do nothing of the sort," said her son-in-law, decisively. "You must stay where you are."

"But it will never do for me to offend his honour by going contrary to his wishes," said Mrs. Cox. "I should be in continual fear of seeing him if I were to remain here now."

"The law will protect you from harm even if he does come," replied Charles. "He has no more power to injure you than you have to injure him."

"But Mr. Marchmont, I should never have the spirit to get into a quarrel with Sir Charles."

"Leave it to me, Mrs. Cox," was Charles's reply.

With his usual promptness he sate down and wrote as follows :—

Sir, I regret that I am unavoidably brought into correspondence with yourself, because it seems altogether impossible under existing circumstances that letters on either side could be otherwise than unpleasant. I find you have been made aware of the fact of my marriage, a marriage I could never repent of. I cannot think that by it I have in any way bettered the position of my wife or mother in-law, and I could not allow the latter to have either her comfort or her chance of a living in any way injured through me. I found

her settled in this village when I sought her daughter as my wife—her friends and her employment are here, and I should think my own conduct reprehensible were I to suffer her close connection with myself to be the cause of her making any sacrifice. Be assured that we none of us wish to trouble you in any way, nor should I ever think of mentioning myself the relationship that exists between us. I return you the ten-pound note, and am yours,

CHARLES MARCHMONT.

Waltham, Jan. 15th, 1814.

This letter remained unanswered, and there was no further intercourse between the Hall and the cottage.

CHAPTER IV.

DEAREST FRIENDS MUST PART.

FOR some few days after the Baronet's remonstrance, Mrs. Cox felt afraid to leave her cottage, and conjured up all kinds of chances that might bring the Granby people past her door. However, she in time got over her alarm, and indeed she was soon too much occupied by a very different and a more interesting affair to give to the Baronet's displeasure much further consideration. Her daughter had been married more than a twelvemonth when she gave birth to a boy, and the first grand-child was to Molly so absorbing an interest that all other hopes, and doubts, and fears were for the present put aside.

Nancy's joy over her first-born was heightened by her husband's evident gratification. The happiness of the latter was not, however, entirely without alloy. When Charles became a father he felt an increased desire to be again recognized as a gentleman, and to give that birthright to his son, but he kept this wish of his heart entirely to himself, and Nancy believed his contentment to be, like hers, complete. She would have had her child named after her husband, but Charles himself objected.

"Your father, Nancy," he observed, "was one of the warmest friends I ever had. My son shall bear his name."

Nancy was pleased with this mark of respect to the old man's memory, and so she assented to Charles's decision without a remonstrance.

About a month after the birth came the christening, always an important day with a mother. Nancy had been at some pains in preparing garments befitting the beautiful ceremony; and as, decked in their best attire, they walked through the pretty country churchyard up to the church, Nancy leaning on her husband's arm, many an admiring glance rested on the two. Nature had been outwardly very bountiful to each, and it was a fact that all could recognize.

"I fancied I saw among your congregation one of the men I had with me on board the *Warrior*. The father, I mean, of the child who was christened."

This observation was made by Admiral Best to his cousin, Mr. Grey, as they were walking home from the church to the Parsonage. The Admiral had come on a visit the previous evening.

"You mean Charles Marchmont," was the reply. "He told me he was on board your ship, and I was intending to have a talk with you about him. He was, I believe, born in a better position than he now occupies."

"Do you happen to know who his father was?" inquired the Admiral.

"I do not—at least not for a certainty. I came here a week or two after the marriage took place. Had I performed the ceremony, I should have been inclined to ask more questions than my predecessor appears to have thought necessary. It is merely his way of talking, and a certain rumour which has recently been afloat, that has led me to suppose what I do."

"Well, I always myself believed him to be a gentleman's son when he served under me," said the Admiral. "He is a fine, noble-hearted fellow, I am quite sure of that, and a braver never walked the deck of a British man-of-war."

"I am glad to find your opinion of him is so good a one, for it disposes me to venture on making you a request in his favour. You have, I believe, a good deal of Government interest just now. If you could use it by getting poor Charles some suitable appointment, I don't think, from what I have seen of him, that he would ever give you cause to repent of your kindness."

"I'll see about it," said the Admiral, and here the matter ended.

Charles's memory had been as good as the Admiral's.

"Did you see that fine-looking old man who was sitting in Mr. Grey's pew?" he said to his wife, as they were walking home from church through the fields? "He was our Admiral when I was on board the *Warrior*. I should like to have spoken to him, but I was afraid of being thought intrusive."

Nancy had been too much occupied with the baby to give one single glance at the stranger, and she felt a little ashamed of not having instinctively spied him out when Charles informed her who he was.

A day or two afterwards the Admiral called at the cottage, and entirely won Nancy's heart by his kind and courteous manner. He asked Charles what his plans were for the future. Charles looked embarrassed, and could only say that he had a friend in Plymouth who was hoping soon to find him something to do.

"Then you would be glad to get some employment," said the Admiral.

"I should, indeed," said Charles in a tone that expressed how deeply he was feeling the want of it.

"I wish I could do something for you," observed the Admiral. "I can vouch for your bravery and general good conduct when under me, and I should like to see you in a better position."

Charles bowed his thanks, and then there was a general leave-taking. Not many days afterwards came a large official letter, with a Royal commission, appointing Charles to the post of midshipman on board Her Majesty's ship the *Warrior*. The same post brought a letter from the Admiral himself, expressing the pleasure it would afford him to have one of his former crew serving with him again under different auspices, and hoping it would not be inconvenient to

Charles to join him at Plymouth in a month's time from thence.

It was with a flush of pleasure that Charles read these two letters, first to himself and then aloud to his wife. He looked to her for sympathy in his joy, but had these letters brought with them a warrant for his execution, Nancy could hardly have looked more miserable. Charles's keen glance pierced from her countenance down into her heart.

"I'll give it up, Nancy," he said, "if it will make you the happier."

"No, Charley," she replied with a sob, "I cannot allow you to throw away such good fortune on my account."

"It's not for myself, Nancy, so much as for you and for the boy that I am unwilling to give it up; and yet for my own credit I should be glad of employment, and I am not likely to get such another chance."

"I know it would not be right," said Nancy, making a desperate effort to look as if she were glad. She failed however in the attempt, and burst into tears.

"I won't leave you though if it's to make you miserable—by God, I won't. Nancy, don't take on in this way, but tell me what you wish."

"I wish you to go, Charles, I feel that you ought to," Nancy murmured. "Don't fret about me—I was taken by surprise"—but poor Nancy looked miserable.

Charles's assiduity and her own strength of will soon, however, brought her round, and she mentally resolved that her husband's happiness at this unlooked-for piece of good fortune should not be marred. She found it a hard task to conceal her feelings, though the constant occupation of preparing her husband for his departure was a great help to her in this respect. Poor Nancy had but little confidence in herself, and she had always been puzzled to make out what it was in her that Charles could ever have found to admire, and so her heart misgave her at the thought of his long absence, and she wondered sometimes if he would love her less when he came back.

The last day arrived—the last hour—the last minute almost, for Nancy's quick ears had caught the sound of the coach that was to bear away what was most precious to her in life. She put their child into her husband's arms, and clung to him herself. He said, looking tenderly and trustingly at her as he spoke,—

“ You'll not forget me, Nancy.”

He had little fear that she would, and his look and manner proved as much.

“ And you'll not forget me, Charley,” was Nancy's imploring answer, and the doubts and fears which had so long been at work within now betrayed themselves for the first time.

“ And do you mistrust me, Nancy,” he asked with a slight tone of reproach.

"I have sometimes been afraid" she said, and burst into tears.

"And have I ever given you any cause?"

"None whatever," was the emphatic answer.

"Then trust on until I do, and you will never fear again."

He gave her one of his brightest smiles, though with a tear glittering in his eye—then a long, last embrace. The coach had stopped at the garden-gate, and in a moment Charles had taken his seat. Poor Nancy watched him from the gate as he waved his handkerchief to her, till with a turn he vanished out of sight. She felt her heart sink within her as she retraced her steps. There seemed a strange dullness within. She went to her room and relieved herself with a flood of tears. Little Tom began crying too, and for his sake she felt she must control her grief.

"Oh, she's wonderfully well," was Mrs. Cox's reply next morning to an inquiring neighbour, "but there, she's quite rapt up in the little one, and its fortunate as it came when it did, for I think as Nancy would have broken her heart if her husband had gone away without leaving anything of his behind. She has a warm heart, has Nancy, and parting comes all the harder to them kind of natures."

CHAPTER V.

THE REMOVE.

THE cottage was beginning to recover, even in Nancy's eyes, something of its former cheerful appearance. Mr. Grey often called, and he had a great faculty for imparting consolation. Charles wrote as often as he could, and his letters were invariably tender and affectionate. Little Tom was an object of unceasing interest to his mother, and though there were in him the germs of his father's proud spirit and strong will, yet by means of constant gentleness and affection Nancy was gradually winning over him an ascendancy which the proud and high-born lady Julia had never gained over any son of hers.

Five years had elapsed since Charles's departure, and Nancy's heart was gladdening at the prospects of her husband's not distant return. They had sustained one loss in their excellent clergyman, who had died suddenly, and whose loss had been but ill-supplied by his successor. Mr. Porter was one of the sporting clergymen of those days. To be foremost in the field had always been his highest aim in life, while to follow in the footsteps of that Saviour whose doctrines he professed to inculcate was—we can hardly

say a secondary one, for to this eager votary of the chase it had never as yet been any aim at all. The sick, the poor and the solitary felt wofully the change, and to Nancy and her mother the pretty village lost one of its principal attractions when Mr. Grey was gone.

In consequence of this change it was with less regret than they would otherwise have experienced that Nancy and her mother received, about two months after their worthy minister's departure, notice to give up their cottage on the following quarter-day. Mr. Walker, the owner of it, was it seemed going to retire from business, and so he wished to occupy it himself. However, to find another dwelling equally suitable proved a more difficult task than they had expected. They tried in vain to get one near at hand, and so when Mr. Walker came over one day to make various arrangements, they asked him if he knew of any cottage to let that was likely to suit them.

“Yes,” was his immediate reply, “there is one at Aubrey that I think would suit ye exactly. It belongs to two very respectable females as have dealt with me for years, and who wouldn’t take advantage of ye in any way. If so be, Mrs. Cox, as you’d like to look at the place, I’d drive ye back with me. I’m sure as my wife would take ye in for the night, and as I shall have to be here again in the morning, I can easily give ye the lift home.”

Mrs. Cox felt some hesitation in accepting the kind offer,

but mounted her landlord's tiny vehicle, and found the cottage was, as Mr. Walker had said, exactly the thing they wanted. The Miss Birches were called upon, and the elder sister, who transacted all business matters, had an interview with Molly in her little back parlour. Her own name was asked for, and then her daughter's, and when the latter was given Miss Birch fancied she remembered it. Charles had, as we have before said, caused a sensation among the young ladies in the neighbourhood, who had expended a good many raptures on him as well as on their own good fortune in having such a nice sailor close at hand to row them on the river. Miss Birch had been visiting some friends at Waltham just as this Marchmont fever was at its highest, and she particularly remembered the name on account of the excellent discourse she had preached thereupon, when warning some of these ecstatic creatures against wasting their admiration on so low-born a man.

"Was your son-in-law a sailor?" she inquired.

"He was, Ma'am," was the reply, "and he is so still. He has been at sea for five years, and we expect him home very shortly."

"Then I quite remember seeing him when I was visiting at Mrs. Grimes's. You used, I believe, to wash for the family. We had your son-in-law with us one day when we went to Moreton, and I remember Mr. Grimes telling me that he was used to the sea."

Poor Molly, though by nature so humble-minded, coloured up a little. She would rather that Miss Birch had not remembered Charles in this particular way. Molly had never herself assumed to be a lady, but she would have wished Charles to have been looked upon as what he was, a gentleman by birth, a gentleman by education, and at present one by profession too. However, she ventured on saying nothing in defence of his dignity, and Miss Birch having received an assurance from Mr. Walker that Mrs. Cox was a quiet, respectable woman who was sure to pay her rent, the bargain was concluded, and soon afterwards the change of residence was made.

Mr. Walker had been much pleased with the care which the inmates of his cottage had bestowed upon it, and so he gave Nancy a *carte blanche* to take from the garden what flowers she pleased. The latter availed herself to a moderate extent, of this permission. A beautiful rose which Charles had planted, and which had grown and flourished during the five years of his absence, was removed by her with especial care. Little Tom was delighted at the prospect of a seven miles drive, and it was by no means a tearful party that quitted Waltham one bright October day. Their new abode, Oak Cottage by name, was quite as pretty and countryfied, as the one they had left, save that it had a Baker's shop in front of it, and though their new garden was not as yet in perfect order, still Nancy hoped e'er long to render it so.

CHAPTER VI.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

EIGHT months had elapsed since Nancy and her mother had settled themselves in their new home. Tom was quite grown out of his babyhood, he was past six, and he was learning to do little errands for his mother. One day he went across to the baker's shop to get a loaf of bread. There was a benevolent-looking old gentleman inside, and the little fellow's handsome face and independent manner attracted his attention.

"Art thou Nancy Marchmont's son?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied Tom.

"Then I want to ask a favour of thy mother, so when thou hast made thy purchases I will walk across with thee."

"I beg thy pardon for intruding, Nancy," said the Quaker upon approaching her, "but there is a rose in thy garden which I always admire in passing, and I was going to ask thee for a cutting. However, thy little boy tells me it is a favourite tree."

"You are welcome to a cutting," said Nancy smiling. "Tom and I notice it because his father raised it. I hope

he will be here himself soon, and then we shan't think so much about his tree."

Nancy took off two or three cuttings, and had she been born and bred a lady, she could not have presented them with more grace.

"Many thanks," said John Brown, bowing politely as he spoke, "I have a pretty garden of my own, and if thy little boy would like to come and see it, I will send my grandchildren to-morrow to fetch him. Wilt thou be ready, Tom, at four o'clock?"

Tom looked up at his mother, and reading an affirmative in her face, "Yes Sir," he replied, and the old man departed leaving a pleasing impression on the mind of each of his new acquaintances.

Before proceeding further in our narrative we must explain how it was that Jane and Lizzie, the Quaker's grand-children, happened to have their home with him. Mr. Lindsay, their father, had been in John Brown's office, and while there he had proposed to the only daughter of his employer; and in spite of a difference in their creed he had been accepted by her. Soon after his marriage some West Indian property was left him by an Uncle which he would gladly have disposed of at once, but the terms of the will rendered this impossible, as in case of Mr. Lindsay's death it was to go to a cousin. He felt himself therefore constrained to leave England at once for the purpose of looking after it; and, as his home would

probably be for the future in Jamaica, his wife accompanied him. Three children had been born to them there, one of whom, a boy of two years younger than Jane, had been carried to an early grave. The doctors blamed the climate, and so Jane and Lizzie, the two remaining children, had been brought to England. The kind Quaker had given them a home, and he was carefully bringing them up in the principles of true, because practical, christianity.

There was a difference of five years in the ages of the two sisters, Jane being just eight, while Lizzie was only three.

Jane was a motherly sort of girl, somewhat prim for her age, and continually bearing in mind her mother's last injunction, that she was to take care of her little sister. Lizzie was a child who seemed as if she would always need to be taken care of. Though she had laughing blue eyes, yet they were easily moved to tears—her smiling lips could sometimes pout if she thought herself or others were aggrieved, while her golden curls and bright complexion betokened a certain delicacy, though they helped to render her what all would have pronounced a very pretty child. Her tender years and the timidity attendant on them endeared her all the more to the benevolent Quaker and Quakeress, while they kept alive in Jane's remembrance her mother's last wishes.

The Quaker's invitation was the pleasantest thing that had occurred to Nancy since her arrival at Aubrey. She liked the old man at once, and she was anxious that he should like

her son. She, therefore, took unusual pains in adorning Tom on the following day, or rather in making the most of those ornaments that were his by nature. The Quaker was as good as his word, and punctually at the hour named, Jane and Lizzie, with their quiet looking nurse, knocked at the cottage door.—“If you please grandmamma sent us for your little boy,” said Jane, as Nancy herself opened it. “She will let James come back with him at eight o’clock.”

Nancy expressed her thanks. She would gladly have taken the trouble of sending back her son off the Quaker’s hands, but she was fearful of intruding. Tom had been doing his best previously to get his mother to accompany him. He had, however, found all his efforts unavailing, so he had made up his mind to enjoy his visit by himself, and taking Jane’s proffered hand, he started merrily enough. He soon, however, discovered that the process of dragging Lizzie along the hot road in her chair was a pleasanter way of getting over the ground than was that of walking by the side of the demure Jane, while Lizzie was wondrously content to submit to the strange boy’s attentions. Bringing his whole activity and energy into play he somewhat scandalized Rachel and Jane by his rapid movements as a slight descent brought them to the Quaker’s door.

“Why Lizzie, thou hast a braver heart than I thought thou had’st,” said Mrs. Brown, as the tiny carriage which held the child was with difficulty stopped by Tom, and Lizzie herself

with her laughing eyes and lips, and unusually rosy cheeks was lifted out by her grandmother. "I am glad to see thee," she said, shaking hands with her guest, "though when thou next hast a fancy for drawing Lizzie, I would rather that thou wentest at a quieter pace." "Why Jane," she continued, turning to her elder grand-daughter, "thou wilt have enough to do to entertain thy friends. Rosa Birch has been here for the last half-hour, and I have asked her to stop to tea. James can take her and Tom home together."

Rosa soon made her appearance. She had been walked round the garden with the Quaker, who loved to display to all whether great or small, his beautiful flower-beds. He had invariably found the aunts very sparing of their praise, and he had now been trying, though not very successfully, to elicit warmer raptures from the niece. Rosa was a child of eight, very forward for her age, and in all her intercourse with Jane Lindsay she considered it befitting that she should take the lead. It was more than an hour to tea-time, and the children were left to amuse themselves as they could. Rosa settled that she would go to the swing, and she and Jane walked on in front, while Tom took Lizzie by the hand and followed close behind. As they passed the verandah,

"Oh ! what a pretty rose," Tom exclaimed. "It's just like one we have got growing on our cottage."

"It's not your cottage," said Rosa, looking round at Tom, and throwing at him a glance of disdain out of her small

grey eyes. "It's my aunt's cottage, and she only lets you live in it."

"It's mother's," said Tom, getting very red, and looking very angry.

"Oh, you naughty boy ! how dare you tell such a fib?" retorted Miss Rosa, who was evidently gratified at having such a charge to prefer against Tom.

"It's you who are naughty and tell fibs," roared the latter. "Hush, hush," interposed Jane. "Grandmama would be so angry if she knew how you are quarrelling!"

A turn in the walk now brought them close in sight of some water.

"Oh, there's a boat !" shouted Tom, leaving both his companions and running towards it.

"Tom, Tom !" cried Jane, "you must not get into it. Grandpapa never lets us get in unless he is with us."

"Oh, that's because you are girls," said Tom. "Boats are meant only for men and boys, and my papa has lived in a ship for a great many years."

Tom soon discovered on stepping in that the boat was fastened by a rope to a stake, and thinking he could get considerably more amusement out of his new play-thing were it free and unconfined, he applied himself to the task of unloosing it. He was much too intent on carrying out his own views for Jane's remonstrances to be of the smallest avail, but fortunately at this moment the Quakeress appeared.

"Jane," she said, with a tone of reproach, "I told thee thou were never to let thy young companions play with the boat."

"She did try to stop me," said Tom, looking up at the new comer, while the colour mounted to his cheeks, "but I wanted to make it swim."

"Then thou wert very wrong in taking so little heed to Jane's words," was the reply. "I hope thou art not brought up at home to be disobedient."

"Mother never told me not to swim a boat," said Tom, his whole face expressing excitement; for he was uncertain whether Mrs. Brown's words were meant to convey a reproach to his parent.

"Well, then, *I* tell thee thou art not to do it here," said Mrs. Brown, smiling benevolently, but with decision in her tone. The open, fearless countenance of the child pleased her. "Remember," she added, "when thou art in my house or garden thou must obey me."

"Yes, ma'am," said Tom, and he again took the hand of Lizzie, who had been preparing herself for a cry when she heard her new friend's disobedience commented on.

"Go to the summer-house," said Mrs. Brown to Jane, "thy grandfather is picking thee a basket of strawberries, and he'll be looking for thee there."

Jane led her companions in that direction. When they reached the summer-house the elder girls seated themselves

side by side, and Rosa whiled away the time by showing Jane her birthday present of a new purse, which her aunt had just given her. In drawing it from her pocket she dropped her pocket-handkerchief, which Lizzie immediately appropriated, and amused herself by making it into a sort of nightcap for Rover, her grandpapa's magnificent Newfoundland dog. He was bearing the operation of having it tied under his jaw with patronising dignity, when Rosa's attention was suddenly attracted to the proceeding.

"Oh, you naughty child!" she exclaimed, "to use my best laced pocket-handkerchief in that way! Give it up this minute," and she snatched at it angrily.

Lizzie seemed to think that possession was more than nine points of the law, and she began to cry piteously when Rosa's superior strength won from her the prize.

"Let her have it," said Tom, who had been amusing himself by rolling down the steep slope on which the summer-house was placed. "There, I'll give you mine instead; she's a nasty, cross girl, and I don't like her."

"How dare you!" said Rosa vehemently, as she flew towards Tom for the purpose of giving him a blow. Again Jane interposed, and the appearance of the Quaker with the strawberries hindered further strife. He announced his intention of giving them a row in the boat, and this proposition so gratified Tom that he threw his arms round the old man's neck, saying as he did so—

"I wish you were my grandpapa as well as Jane's and Lizzie's?"

Eight o'clock came at last, although Tom seemed unwilling to credit the fact.

"We shall be glad to see thee here another time, my little fellow," said the Quaker as he took leave of him, "and when next Rosa comes she can bring thee with her."

"But I don't like Rosa, and I'd rather come with mama," was Tom's reply.

"Thou shouldest not dislike anyone," said Mrs. Brown, correcting him; "neither should little boys take a delight in saying rude things. Tell thy mother I will call on her to-morrow—I would have come to-day, only I was engaged."

From Rosebank, the Quaker's pretty little domain, to Oak Cottage, there was about a mile of straight road. Richmond Villa, the retreat of the Misses Birch, was situated on the same road, and between Rosebank and the cottage, though of the two Nancy was their nearest neighbour. As soon as James with the two children got into the road, Tom took hold of his attendant's hand, while Rosa kept a-head of them, and as soon as she arrived at her aunt's garden gate she turned in without vouchsafing either James or Tom a parting word or look of recognition.

"I don't like that girl," said Tom, as soon as he was free of Rosa's presence.

"Ah, she's a proud lot," was James's reply; "but like always breeds like."

Rosa Birch was passing her summer holidays with her aunts, the elder of whom was anxious to do her duty by her. To preserve her niece's mind in its original purity was, as she thought, an essential part of this duty, and the most effectual means of doing so lay, as she conceived, in guarding her from all contact with vulgar associates.

"Well, my dear," she said to her niece, as Rosa entered, "have you had a pleasant evening?"

"I should have liked it aunt," was the reply, "if it had not been for that vulgar, rude boy who was there all the time."

"What vulgar boy?" inquired Miss Birch, who had caught at the first adjective at once.

"Why, Tom Marchmont, and what do you think he said, Aunt? He declared that Oak Cottage belonged to his mother, and contradicted me in the rudest manner when I said it was yours!"

"Well!" said Miss Birch, as soon as she had suffered her countenance to relax from the look of motionless astonishment, which her niece's information had caused it to assume. "Well! if ever there was a simpleton in the world, John Brown is he. To think of his taking a common boy like that so entirely out of his position! I could have told him what the consequences would be—but there—John

thinks no one so wise as himself—I must go and have a talk with Martha to-morrow, and see if I can beat a little sense into her. But Rosa—he was not surely allowed to sit in the drawing-room?"

"No, Aunt, they did not put him in the drawing-room. We all had tea together in the parlour."

"Mercy on us! what will the Quaker do next?" exclaimed the irate spinster, and throwing her knitting entirely on one side, she took a hasty turn up and down the room. "Mrs. Brown *did* scold Tom for being so disobedient about the boat," continued Rosa, pleased with the sensation her words were evidently exciting, "but he didn't seem to care—and then Mr. Brown took us all for a sail, and Tom told him he would like him for his grandfather."

Here Mrs. Birch stopped abruptly in her hasty walk round the apartment.

"And did Mr. Brown put no check on such familiarity?" she said, after she had recovered her breath at the announcement.

"Oh Aunt! he looked quite pleased—I thought he would have kissed Tom; but he didn't."

"Well my dear," said her aunt, "I am sorry that I should have been unintentionally the cause of your being thrown into such low society, however I will at once see that nothing of the kind occurs again. And now go to bed."

"What a strange thing it was," observed Miss Birch

mysteriously to her sister, as soon as Rosa had left the room, "that that vulgar boy should ever have dared to express such a wish to the Quaker! Such thoughts don't come into children's heads of themselves. I wonder if Joseph Brown has ever been foolish enough to let Nancy Marchmont see that he admires her."

Joseph was the Quaker's son who had lately been spending a week or two at Rosebank, and who had ventured on expressing to Miss Birch herself his admiration for her pretty-looking tenant.

"Quite impossible!" said Rebecca angrily. She had been cherishing a firm, though a most unreasonable conviction that she was herself the sole object of Joseph's admiration.

"Well," said Miss Birch, "it seems very strange. We must take care that the boy never gets into our garden, and I'll do my duty towards the Browns as far as warning them goes."

Miss Birch did do what she considered to be her duty promptly and manfully, and like so many others who take such strenuous measures for the inculcation of their own selfish views, under the fair pretext of duty, she found that her efforts had an entirely contrary effect to what she had intended. Mrs. Brown called on Nancy immediately after Miss Birch's duty visit was ended, and being favourably impressed by the visit, the inmates of Rosebank and Oak Cottage became for the future the warmest of friends,

CHAPTER VII.

ASPIRING NATURES.

It may be desirable to say something concerning the previous history of the two ladies whose tenants Nancy had become. They were the daughters of a surgeon who had for some years followed his profession in the neighbouring town of Granton, and who had been enabled during that time, to put by a little money. He had bought the villa which the Misses Birch now occupied, and had bequeathed it to them with a very fair income besides.

Mrs. Birch had been born a step or two lower in the social scale than her husband, and in consequence she had always entertained an extreme anxiety to make her own circle of acquaintance very select. It never had struck her that there might be a similar ambition on the part of those who were above her, and whose acquaintance she so sedulously sought, nor did she take into account, in her eager ambition to ascend, that in doing so she might be acting in contradiction to those principles which she so strenuously upheld.

Ambitious mothers are always eager to get their daughters well married, and Mrs. Birch had been no exception to this

rule. At one time too Matilda, the elder, was supposed by her family to be in a fair way of becoming the curate's wife. He was a man of "good family," and had come to Aubrey fresh from his ordination. Being in the first dawn of youthful enthusiasm, he had thrown himself, heart and soul, into his work. Miss Birch was the active member of the family, and as she had some taste for parish work and still more for the position of a clergyman's wife, she laboured under his auspices, and with an equal amount of energy. Mr. Stone was often asked to tea, and as he always accepted the invitation if he could, Mrs. Birch was beginning to consider that it was already an engagement all but in name. Perhaps an unprejudiced looker-on, might have guessed that his interest was more absorbed in his work, than in her who had constituted herself his helper. For two years Miss Birch went on toiling in his service, and wondering when the time would arrive for her labours to be requited, when one morning Mr. Stone entered Mrs. Birch's drawing-room at an unusually early hour, and with a singularly beaming countenance.

On seeing him Miss Birch's first idea was that some family difficulty had been overcome, and that the long expected proposal was about to be made. His visit was in fact to announce his intended departure. He had been promoted to a good living close to the family mansion, and it was this circumstance that had lighted up his naturally grave features.

TOM MARCHMONT.

In spite of the disappointment Matilda Birch hoped on, and framed various reasons for his silence in a matter that so nearly touched her ambition, if not her heart. However, on the day previous to his departure Mr. Stone called to take leave, and betrayed during his visit no emotion whatever. He talked of Matilda's exertions as if she had been privileged in making them, and expressed a hope that his successor might be as ready to accept of them as he had been himself. The most sanguine person could have hoped no longer. Miss Birch for a time indulged in an interesting melancholy, and afterwards she became soured. She talked much of the coldness and ingratitude of the world ; took to very low-church principles, and expressed at all times the strongest aversion to everything popish, while Mrs. Birch was continually hinting to her friends that if Stone had not had such Romish tendencies there might have been a chance of his marrying Matilda.

The Misses Birch had recently lost their one remaining parent, and as Matilda, the elder, was considerably nearer forty than thirty, she felt equal to the necessity which in consequence devolved on her of joining the numerous band of unprotected females. Rebecca had considerably the advantage of Matilda in the way of looks, and her naturally quiet yielding nature rendered her more generally popular than was her active and strong-minded sister, who was her senior by ten years. On their mother's death Matilda ruled

supreme—she arranged the particular work that was to devolve on each, visiting the poor herself, and giving them many an useful lesson against pride. She thought it desirable that Rebecca, being so much younger, should keep up something of her school-education, so the casting up of accounts was the portion allotted to her of the daily work, together with the care of the linen. Matilda carefully treasured up her mother's principles with regard to their circle of acquaintance, and as Rebecca had an implicit faith in her sister's sagacity, she peacefully assented to her views.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNEXPECTED NEWS, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

ONE week wore on and then another, and still no tidings came to Nancy of her husband's expected return. On Mrs. Brown's first visit, Mrs. Marchmont had revealed to her how eager she was for news, and so it had been arranged that as John Brown took in a daily paper he was to stop every morning at Nancy's gate, on his way to his office, to report if there were any intelligence. One bright morning in July Nancy was as usual on the look-out for him. As he approached her heart began to beat; his walk and his countenance foreboded bad news. Nancy felt her head swimming as he stood opposite to her at the garden-gate, which she held with both her hands to keep herself from falling. Tom was by his mother's side and, perceiving there was something the matter, he began to cry. The Quaker wept, too.

"Oh! tell me what it is?" gasped Nancy.

"There has been a shipwreck,"—John Brown had said enough—Nancy turned deadly pale, her knees sunk under her, and in a moment she was on the ground. The little

boy was terrified at seeing his mother in this state, and he began screaming his heart out. Mrs. Cox was within, and startled at hearing her grand-son's cries, she ran out to see what was the matter. The Quaker put the paper into her hand, asked if he could be of any use, and being answered in the negative, he thought it best to leave Nancy to her sorrow. The scene of distress which the kind man's intelligence occasioned had, however, touched him to the heart, and it gave him for the future a very warm feeling towards the widowed mother and her orphan child. The shock which Nancy had received had been too much for her, and for weeks she was laid up. Tom's love for his remaining parent showed itself strongly in her sorrow, and at first he would not be induced to leave her room, neither had Nancy the strength nor the inclination to drive him from it. However, a child's tears are quickly dried, and soon Tom found himself again at Rosebank, passing a happy day with his new companions, while his mother pined at home.

Nine months had passed away since Nancy had first been made aware of her misfortune, and though the intensity of her grief was diminishing, yet it had left behind a sadness and a depression which Mrs. Cox would have gladly seen removed. She had shunned all companionship save that of her mother and her son, and she had been leading a sedentary life, working with her needle to help on her funds and to

enable her by-and-bye to give Tom some kind of schooling. She looked pale and thin, and it was evident that though her assiduity might be beneficial to her purse, yet that it was telling wofully on her health.

It was on a fine morning in April that Mrs. Brown, who had seldom hitherto ventured to intrude on the widow's solitude, left her home with the determination of bringing the mourner back with her if she could. She succeeded, and the little change of scene seemed to do Nancy good. The ice being thus broken, the latter was prevailed on frequently to accompany her son to the friendly, hospitable house, and Mrs. Brown believed that this little recreation just saved the mourner from sinking into an early tomb.

This increasing intimacy between her friends and her tenants was most offensive to Miss Birch. Nancy's demeanour was however so subdued, so quiet and retiring, that Matilda could not find a stone to throw at her. She therefore confined her remarks in that quarter to expressions of surprise that such undesirable familiarity should not have had a more deleterious effect on the recipient of it. It was on John and Martha Brown that the chief brunt of her displeasure fell, and the strong feelings she entertained on this particular subject lent such a fluency to her tongue when discussing it in their presence, that the Quaker's patience soon became exhausted. Indeed, what with her warnings

and prognostications as regarded his favourites, and her derogatory views respecting his flower-beds, the spinster succeeded at last in making herself thoroughly obnoxious to John Brown, and if the kind old man nurtured a feeling of spite against any one, Miss Birch was the object of it.

CHAPTER IX.

VILLAGE ENTERTAINMENTS, AND HOW THEY ENDED.

SPRING had again come round, and with it the flowers attendant on the season. The Misses Birch gave occasional tea-parties, which were rather popular among some of their acquaintances, who were always sure to be entertained with excellent tea, quantities of muffins, and an equally large supply of gossip. They had a very fine bed of anemones just coming into bloom, and as their drawing-room looked out on the garden they arranged one of these parties for the time when their anemone-bed was likely to be in perfection.

Mr. and Mrs. Date, their clergyman and his wife, were to be their principal guests on this occasion. Then there were Mrs. and the Miss Tripps, the widow and daughters of a defunct attorney. Captain Bamford was always sure of an invitation to these tea-gatherings. He held a commission in his Majesty's service which gave him a certain rank. He was, besides, the principal promoter of mirth and hilarity among the guests. His four o'clock dinner, and his customary glass preceding so closely the Misses Birch's six o'clock tea, had to be sure a somewhat soporific effect on the bluff sailor during

the early part of these entertainments, though even then he did his best to make himself agreeable. It was, however, heavy labour before his nap overtook him. When he woke up out of it refreshed, about an hour before the time fixed on for leave-taking, nine o'clock, his rough and ready jokes came in conveniently, for the other guests were by that time having their turn of drowsiness, and though the Captain had by no means the same rage for gentility possessed by his two female friends, yet his occasional want of refinement was pardoned him, it being generally whispered that a certain Royal sailor also liked a joke, and it was supposed besides that the wit originating on board a man-of-war never did possess the delicate flavour of that which the drawing-room might be expected to produce.

There was another way of accounting for the Captain's constant appearance at these teatotal festivities. He entertained a feeble idea of some day making Rebecca his wife, though he considered that there was time enough yet for taking active measures towards the furtherance of this scheme, and in the meanwhile he directed his attentions chiefly to Miss Birch. That lady, considering herself, as she did, to be of a more suitable age for him than her sister (the Captain was some two or three years Matilda's senior), she being besides the object to which his attentions were especially directed, was not perhaps altogether unreasonable in imagining that it was to her hand the sailor aspired, and she

was already entertaining visions of the reformation she would work in him as soon as their married life had commenced.

John Brown himself could not have denied that on this particular evening the general effect of his rival's drawing-room to anyone entering it was good. Among other things the Misses Birch took a pride in their tea-service, and a portion of their savings from year to year was spent in improving it. Then they had a very nice vase of flowers in the centre of the table, while the view of the anemone bed from the window was really gorgeous. They arrayed in their best green silk dresses, with white scarfs thrown over their shoulders, presided over the repast, while the visitors sate around. Mr. Date supported Miss Birch on the right, while the Captain had her left ear, and just now he was full of rather heavy raptures over the anemone bed. "Well," he said, "that bed of flowers really beats anything I ever saw. It's only a pity you can't send it off to the Pavilion at Brighton just as it is, for I'll lay any wager it would be the finest sight there."

Miss Birch's smile in acknowledgement of the compliment was particularly gracious.

"Mr. Brown has a beautiful bed of anemones, too," observed the youngest Miss Tripp, who in making the remark proved herself to be a less skilful tactician than was the drowsy Captain. The observation was passed by unnoticed, but the

mention of the name brought under review the ill-judged proceedings of the owner of it.

"What can John Brown be thinking of," observed Miss Birch, "in getting up such an intimacy between himself and Molly Cox's daughter. If he chooses people of that class for his associates it's my opinion he will shortly lose all his friends worth having!"

"Is it Mrs. Marchmont you are speaking of?" inquired Mr. Date who, like Miss Fanny Tripp, did not show himself to have the acuteness of his nautical friend. "She is a remarkably pretty woman, and as far as I can see, a quietly-disposed one too."

"Those quietly-disposed women ain't always to be trusted," observed Miss Birch with a look of sagacity. "If I were Mrs. Brown I should hardly approve of such a friendship. Old men are very foolish sometimes, and if John Brown were to become a widower I would not answer for the consequences."

There was a general laugh at this remark, which seemed to entertain the Captain even more than it did the rest of the party.

"I wonder if there is any truth in the report," observed Mrs. Date mysteriously, "about Mrs. Marchmont's husband having been well-connected."

"Truth in it!" exclaimed Miss Birch contemptuously, "most decidedly not. If there were a shade of truth in it

they would talk about it themselves—but so many idle reports get about that I always say they are wisest who believe none of them."

"We have got a wonderful man come in the place of Mr. Gregg," observed Mr. Date, who thought it would be as well to change the conversation. "I took him for a Romish priest when I first saw him. I only hope he is not clever enough to do much harm."

"He'll do it if he can," said Miss Birch with asperity. He carries about with him the Jesuits' book of prayer, and such underhand practices look suspicious."

"Oh, Matilda!" said her sister, "you know it was only Sally Yapp who told us that, and it was positively contradicted by Mr. White, the Churchwarden."

"He may contradict it as much as he pleases," said Miss Birch testily. "I most fully believe Sally's statement, and I say a man like that is a disgrace to the church."

"Hear, hear!" cried Mr. Date, "When you and I, Miss Birch, have the making of bishops and priests we shall choose none but the right sort of men."

This exclamation on the part of Mr. Date had the effect of arousing the Captain from a heavy slumber into which he had just fallen. Hearing of the right sort of men he associated them with the naval part of his Majesty's service.

"Ah!" he said, "true enough. There's many a Captain

like me starving on half-pay, who is worth a dozen of those d——d aristocracy fellows who get all the good things!"

At this *apropos* remark Fanny Tripp set off into a titter, for which she got her toe pinched by her mother under the table, and then to take off the attention of the company from this error in good breeding on the part of her daughter, Mrs. Tripp proposed to Miss Birch that they should go into the garden for a nearer inspection of the anemone bed.

The Misses Birch's party like all other pleasant things came to an end, and as, on the departure of the guests, the two ladies were carefully putting away their silver, they congratulated themselves on the success of their entertainment.

On the following afternoon Mrs. Marchmont and Tom were paying one of their frequent visits at Rosebank. Mrs. Brown was not at home, and the Quaker had taken them into the garden for the purpose of showing them his own bed of anemones which, like the Misses Birch's, was just then in all its glory.

"Oh! look Tom," exclaimed Nancy, "did you ever see anything so beautiful!"

"It's quite a pleasure showing thee anything," said the Quaker, delighted at her evident admiration. "Thou can't afford to approve of thy neighbour's goods as well as of thine own. Now with Tilda and Becky Birch it is so different. They were here this morning, and if thou wilt believe me, they passed that bed without so much as looking at it.

'Turn thy head the other way,' I said to Becky, who was walking by my side, 'I don't think as thou hast in thy garden anything better than that!' Tilda was behind, and she would not give Becky time to answer. 'Come to us tomorrow,' she screamed out, 'and I'll show you a finer bed of anemones than you'll meet with anywhere far or near.' She's a proud woman, is Tilda Birch, and if her pride were only in her flowers, one would not so much mind. But there——we've all got our faults, and perhaps it's as well to try and not see our neighbour's."

Mrs. Brown was later than usual in returning home, and Nancy was just going to take her leave when the Quaker said, "Do stop and take a cup of tea with us—Martha will be home soon, and, she'll be sorry not to see thee."

Nancy consented; no sooner however had the invitation passed the Quaker's lips than he wished he could recall it, for he just remembered that his wife had that morning invited the Misses Birch to tea, in order that they might meet James Maxwell, a nephew of the Quakers, who had lately seen the Misses Birch's brother. He was going to murmur something about other visitors when his wife appeared with Mr. Maxwell by her side. Mrs. Brown's welcome to Nancy was always as cordial as her husband's. Having introduced his nephew to the latter the Quaker informed his wife that he had invited Nancy to tea. He looked when he gave her the information as if he were doubtful how she would take

it. Mrs. Brown had a feeling of indifference for the Misses Birch's notions and opinions which her husband did not altogether entertain. She could therefore afford to laugh, instead of getting irritated at their professed contempt for the Quaker's flower-beds, and she minded as little whether they approved or not of their friends and favourites.

"And I hope thou hast got her consent," she said, giving Nancy a benevolent smile as she spoke. "Well, Tom," she added, turning to the boy, "what dost thou think of John Brown's anemones. Would'st thou not like to have such a bed in thy garden?"

"I should very much," said Tom.

"Then I'll give thee some seed, and thou shalt try what thou canst do next year. Come in, Nancy, and take off thy bonnet; its later than I thought," and Nancy followed her hostess into the house.

They had just descended, and were sitting in the drawing-room with the tea-things all laid out. Nancy noticed two additional cups and plates, and she was wondering who the expected visitors could be, when the door opened, and the Misses Birch were announced. Miss Birch had entered first, and she gave a start on seeing Nancy seated with Mr. Maxwell at her side, evidently trying his best to make himself agreeable. The Misses Birch had on their best dresses, which had always the effect on Matilda of giving her an additional air of importance. First giving a look of under-

standing to Rebecca, Miss Birch sailed up to Mrs. Brown, and thus addressed her :—

“I regret that I and my sister can pay you but a short visit on this occasion, but we follow the teaching of our parents by keeping strictly to our own sphere of society, and we must decline breaking through our rule, even for the sake of such old friends as yourselves.”

Nancy’s first impulse was to rise, and she was on the point of offering to leave the room, when Mrs. Brown, observing her intention, interposed—

“Thou hast a right, Matilda,” she said, “to do as it pleaseth thee. John and I think Nancy Marchmont as good company as thyself.”

“I am sorry—” murmured the Quaker, terrified at his wife’s audacity. He recollect ed that Nancy was Miss Birch’s tenant, and feared there might be a chance of a summary ejection.

Mrs. Brown judged rightly in supposing that Miss Birch would never give up so desirable a tenant merely because the Quaker had made a blunder, and she was resolved on facing it out by not admitting that it was one.

“There’s no harm done,” she said promptly, “or at least it’s done to Naney if it’s done at all,” and Mrs. Brown looked kindly at her as she spoke, for the poor woman seemed as if she were going to faint.

“Well,” said Miss Birch, as she sailed out of the room,

her sister following her, "perhaps when you next give us an invitation you will tell us what company we are to expect," and the door closed with a slam behind the indignant spinster.

Tom had been giving his whole attention to the scene, and he at once took in the fact that the Misses Birch were too proud to sit in the same room with his mother. He stood by her chair, leaning against her, his blue eyes filled with tears of pride, while his arm was thrown over her shoulder. James Maxwell thought as he looked at the two that he had never seen anything which to his mind would have made so pretty a picture. "I'm sorry," was the Quaker's first stammering exclamation, "that all this should have occurred.—I'd sooner"—he added, and he paused for a strong expression, "I'd sooner Tilda had gone and trampled on my anemones there," and he pointed towards the window, "than that she should have behaved herself as she has done."

"Never mind, John," said his wife cheeringly—"There's no harm done—Matilda has lowered herself and not us or Nancy either—and now let's come to tea."

James Maxwell did his uttermost to make up to Mrs. Marchmont for the incivility of his Aunt's invited guests, nor had he time to weary of his efforts for Nancy always left early. He insisted on escorting her home, and as he took leave of her at the garden gate he ventured on expressing the hope he had entertained that the walk would have

been a longer one. There was a bright moon shining on Nancy's sweet pale features as she looked up to thank him for his escort.

"What a heavenly countenance!" thought James to himself, "it is one I should like to dwell upon for ever!"

He dwelt upon it in imagination as he walked back, and in words as he re-entered the drawing-room—

"What a charming woman that is, Aunt!" was his first exclamation.

"Ay, and she's as good as she's charming," put in the Quaker, who admired Nancy every bit as much as he did his bed of anemones.

The events of the evening had kindled into vehemence in Tom's breast the passion of pride—of pride that had been wounded, and which longed for redress. His mother had been insulted. The Quaker had often told him he was to take care of his mother, and yet he had done nothing in her defence. On their return home he heard her narrate to his Grandmother how vexed she had been. It was such a pity, she said, that Mr. Brown had not told her who was coming! If he had done so she would have left at once. The old woman was very much vexed also, and Tom felt more and more angry.

Miss Birch walked home that evening in a state of great contentment—a contentment occasioned by the intense satisfaction she felt in her own presence of mind—indeed

her promptness and decision called forth all her powers of self-congratulation. When she found herself once more seated in her own parlour she informed her sister of the means she meant to adopt for showing Nancy that she considered her conduct, as well as the Browns', deserving of reprobation.

The sisters had collected together a good many books of which they had made a kind of lending library—a worthy intention on their part which they had very worthily carried out. It was but few among the poorer classes in those days who were able to read. Miss Birch had therefore been very glad to find that Mrs. Cox and her daughter were both sufficiently well educated to be capable of imbibing through the aid of these books, the very low Church principles which she was so fond of promulgating. They were in consequence among the number of those to whom these books had hitherto been lent. Miss Birch decided on giving Nancy to understand that, as she was going so far out of the position it was intended she should occupy, it was thought no longer desirable that she should benefit by the loan of the books. The next morning therefore, between eight and nine, there was a sharp knock at the cottage door. Nancy went out to see what this loud knock betokened. It was the Misses Birch's very pert maid who had been sent over by her mistress to say she wanted the book that was in Mrs. Marchmont's possession, and that Miss Birch would expect

her to bring it herself, as she wished to have a talk with her.

Tom was at Nancy's side while this message was being delivered. He was an observer of countenance and he saw terror depicted on his mother's, while Betty's wore the unmistakeable impress of vulgar insolence. Though a child in years, he was but eight, he seemed to feel a man at once.

"You shan't go there," he said—"I will take the book for you," and he went at once to the table where it was lying.

"Let me put it in paper," said his mother, "you can say that I will call in the course of the day."

"I shan't," was the reply, and he ran off fortified with the idea that he was for once obeying the Quaker's injunctions by defending his mother from further provocation. On Tom's arrival the two ladies were in their parlour, which looked out upon the road, finishing their breakfast. There was a little side-gate leading round to the entrance. Tom went manfully up the garden-walk, without turning to the right hand or to the left, until he came within sight of the bed of anemones. This bed was closely associated in Tom's mind with Miss Birch's recent misdemeanours. He could not resist the inclination he had to give the flowers a kick—one kick led to another. The love of mischief seemed to have developed itself in Tom's nature as rapidly as the feeling of pride. He had fairly plunged into it, and

he began to enjoy the fun. He no longer restricted his exertions to the sides of the bed but, reckless of consequences, his nimble feet had soon trampled over every part of it. He kicked and scuffed and made such a dust among the flowers that their glory quickly vanished.

The Misses Birch were in the habit of descending in their dressing gowns and curl papers, and breakfast over, they went upstairs to dress themselves for the day. Rebecca's room was over the drawing-room, while Matilda herself preferred overlooking the road. Rebecca went to the window as was her wont, intending to take a look at the anemones before doing her hair at the glass which was in front of it.

"Matilda, Matilda," screamed the agitated lady.

Tom was just ending his performance with a tremendous kick-up of his legs, by way of a vigorous finale, while the book was at the same time tossed into the air. Matilda was in an instant at her sister's side. "Good Heavens!" she exclaimed, and in a moment the window was thrown open, and "how dare you, you bad boy!" shouted from it in a tone which compelled the offender's attention.

Tom looked up fearlessly; then, dreading a colloquy with the injured ladies, he put the book on the lawn and went off homewards at a rapid pace. On re-entering the cottage, he ran up to his mother in an ecstasy of delight at his morning's performance.

"Mother," he said, "Miss Birch can't tease Mr. Brown any more about her anemones, for they are all gone now!"

"All gone! what do you mean?"

Tom read anything but gladness in his mother's countenance, and his own delight was at an end. A sudden fear came over him and, colouring up, he went on in an altered tone, "Mother, I did it."

"You did it!" moaned Nancy, and the tone and the look brought tears into the boy's eyes.

He put his arms round her neck.

"Yes, mother," he said, "I did it," and the sobs came thick and fast.

"And have I been such a bad mother to you, Tom, that you should have learnt to take a pleasure in so unjust and unkind an act?"

Tom said nothing, but he went on sobbing on his mother's breast till her tender heart melted towards him.

"We will say nothing more about it, Tom," she said, "I will go to the Misses Birch and ask their forgiveness."

"No, no!" said the child, his pride taking alarm at the mere thought.

Mrs. Cox had been a silent witness of the scene, and now her own more worldly fears broke forth into words.

"Why Tom," she said, "you'd never be so selfish as to let your mother and me be turned adrift just because you have behaved very ill, and now don't choose to beg pardon."

Tom's sobs and tears broke forth afresh, and between Nancy's compassion for her son, her sorrow for his fault, and her fears for the consequences, she was altogether in a very unenviable state of mind.

As soon as Tom had disappeared, Miss Birch hastily arranged her curls, put on her bonnet, and then a large shawl to hide the deficiencies in her attire. Thus equipped she followed Tom with slower, though for her unusually hasty steps to his mother's house. She came in unannounced and in the midst of Tom's last violent fit of sobbing. Though with sundry grievous defects of character, Miss Birch had something of a woman's heart—Tom's sobs and his mother's troubled countenance, as she rose to receive her unexpected visitor, succeeded in touching it.

"I am glad to see," she said, "that you have had the sense to correct your son—with such a disposition as he has shown, I am sure correction is needful. I was intending to give you notice to quit my cottage, but I feel it would be hardly fair to do so now since you are taking apparently the right steps towards preventing the recurrence of such gross misbehaviour. I shall not object either to your continuing the use of our books, especially as I have one addressed in particular to naughty boys. I will send it you on my return home, and you will do well to read it at once to your son."

"Tom has behaved very badly," said his mother, "and I am sure if I tell him so, it will be a security against his

ever acting in such a way again. He is very sorry, and so am I."

"I see you are," said Miss Birch, "and I blame Mr. Brown far more than I do you. It is he that has been the spoiling of that boy," and without waiting for the defence of her friend which rose to Nancy's lips, Miss Birch hurried out of the room, burning with impatience to expend her wrath upon the Quaker. On arriving at Rosebank, she gave a more impetuous knock and ring than it was her wont to give.

"Who's coming in such a bustle?" said John Brown to his wife, as he was leisurely preparing himself for his morning's walk to his office.

Miss Birch entered to answer the question in person.

"Well, Tilda," said the Quaker, "what's the matter? Thou look'st heated this fine, cool morning!"

"And with good cause," said Miss Birch imperiously. "It's really shameful,—but I blame you both far more than I do the boy himself."

"Why, Matilda, whatever is the matter?" inquired the Quakeress.

"Matter! why matter enough—My beautiful anemone-bed kicked and trampled all to pieces by Molly Cox's grandson!"

"What!" said Mrs. Brown, looking aghast at the news.

"You may well look astonished, but it's a fact nevertheless, and it all comes of your making too much of those people, and taking them out of their proper position."

This was a hard hit at Mrs. Brown, and she began to feel sensitively how unfortunate had been the *rencontré* of the preceeding evening. She was seriously vexed, while with the Quaker, to speak the plain truth, it was the reverse. His wife, in whose judgment he had implicit faith, had assured him that there was no fear of an ejection, and now he inwardly chuckled over Miss Birch's misfortune. They had been rivals, and she had taken a pleasure in blazoning her fancied superiority. He was too just now cherishing an unusually angry feeling towards her on account of her behaviour to the guest of his own inviting.

Mrs. Brown had so poor an opinion of Miss Birch's understanding that she did not consider her airs and pretensions worth getting angry about, but that Tom should have misbehaved himself was to her a serious mortification. However she was determined on defending the boy, her husband, and herself, and on parrying Miss Birch's thrust in the best way she could.

"Thou should'st not say, Matilda, that it all comes through John and me. Blame thyself first, for if thou hadst behaved more like a Christian, and not turned thy back upon a worthy woman, none of this would have occurred. Tom has committed a great fault, and thou hast been the cause."

"Oh ! we all know you never can be in the wrong," retorted Miss Birch, her anger waxing hotter. "I thought at

least that I should have had an apology, but as you don't seem inclined to make one, I'll stop no longer," and she flounced out of the room with her back as straight as a poker, as the Quaker afterwards described it.

"It is an unfortunate affair!" observed Mrs. Brown to her husband, when Miss Birch had taken her departure.

"Well, it's my fault from beginning to end," said the Quaker good-naturedly, "but I'll make it up to Tilda, and I dare say the storm will soon blow over. She was saying she wanted a few roses. I'll send her some real good ones, and she won't vex much about the anemones, thou may'st depend."

"Well John, thou wert always a peace-maker," said Mrs. Brown with a smile that indicated peace and goodwill in that household, whatever there might be else where, "I must though," she added, "go and reprove the boy, not but what I expect Nancy has done that already."

"Thou may'st be sure she has," said the Quaker, "and I think one scolding is enough for a bit of mischief like that." The Quaker's inward feelings all tended towards the whitening of the offence.

"It was a great fault though," said Mrs. Brown seriously, "and I should think myself no friend to Tom if I did not let him see that I consider it one."

Mrs. Brown went at once to the cottage with all that

nervousness of feeling which a kind-hearted person must experience, when the visit to a friend is for the purpose of finding fault. Nancy did not try to screen her son, while if Tom had committed a murder, he could not have looked a greater culprit. He had paid most dearly for his amusement, so dearly that it was likely to prove the last piece of mischief he would ever be implicated in.

Mrs. Brown always liked to perform any duty she had set herself, so Tom received his lecture, and having got through her disagreeable task the kind old lady thought herself justified in giving the penitent's handsome face a kiss, which was received with a flush of pleasure by the boy, with a bright look of gratitude from the mother, and with a low curtsey from Molly Cox.

James Maxwell entered the parlour at Rosebank just as his aunt had left it for the purpose of going and admonishing the offender. He had been preparing himself for a visit to Oak Cottage, ostensibly to make Tom a present of a new top which he had just been buying, but in reality to have an interview with the widow before he started by the twelve o'clock coach. When told by his uncle of the turmoil, he felt he could not with any propriety make the top an excuse for his visit; he thought besides that there would be no chance of his finding Nancy alone, so he desisted from his purpose, and it is probable that Tom's behaviour had not only procured for himself a reprimand from the aunt, but

that it had likewise lost his mother the chance of accepting or rejecting the nephew. Whether Nancy would have availed herself of so substantial an offer, had it been made her, remains a question *much* open to doubt.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHERRY TREE.

To every admirer of cultivated nature John Brown's garden and pleasure grounds afforded singular attractions. Well-kept flower beds surrounded the mansion, and their tasteful form, and the good combination of colours which they presented to the eye, were two of the things in which the humble minded Quaker took an innocent pride. Beyond and to the right evergreens and flowering shrubs concealed from view a very pretty piece of water, causing the stranger's surprise to be the greater when he suddenly came upon it. To the left the smooth lawn sloped upwards to the summer-house, from whence were to be caught the last rays of the setting sun as they gilded the old church spire, which was a prominent object in the foreground.

On a summer evening this was to the Quaker a very favourite place of resort. The underwood in the grove beyond afforded shelter to the nightingale and the linnet, and their song was one among the many voices of creation that the old man most dearly loved to hear. The frequent inroads made by feathered songsters into the garden were

unattended with danger to themselves. John Brown never forgot that the same God who had formed him had likewise made the birds, and that in His own wisdom he had given them sensations of enjoyment and instincts for choosing that food which was most fitted for them. The fine cherry tree which stood beside the summer house afforded many a feast to the blackbird and the thrush, and the Quaker loved to watch them. They hopped among its branches and selected for their own use some of the choicest of its fruit.

Beyond the cherry tree an old elm spread out its stately limbs, and in it beauty and usefulness were combined. It shut out the lane at the back, and likewise concealed from view the Quaker's stables. On one of its strongest branches John Brown had suspended a swing, which was to the children a source of endless delight.

Spring had passed away and had given place to the first summer month. It was a fine evening in June, and Tom was spending it at Rosebank. After tea the Quaker told him he might go into the garden with Lizzie and pick her a dozen cherries, taking an equal quantity for himself. Jane was kept in with a sore throat, and Lizzie, though a dainty little lady in the choice of her companions, was always satisfied to go anywhere with Tom alone. He had led her to the tree and was absorbed in looking after the best and ripest cherries, while the child was holding out her pinafore to receive them. Suddenly the little gate leading into the

lane opened, and Jacob Birch appeared. This boy went to rather a celebrated school at Granton, the neighbouring town, and he was in the habit of spending his Sundays and holidays at Richmond Villa. He had often in consequence heard his aunt's tenants brought under review, and he was a ready recipient of any opinions that were derogatory to Tom, for whom he entertained what Miss Birch might have termed a most proper contempt. Here seemed to be a fine opportunity afforded him of giving vent to this amiable feeling. "I say, young fellow, have you had leave to pick those cherries?" he inquired in a domineering tone. To this question Tom did not condescend to give an answer. Lizzie was surprised at this indisposition on the part of her friend to defend his character, and she seemed to think in consequence that the duty devolved on herself of defending it for him.

"Grandpapa told Tom he *was* to pick cherries for himself and for me," she said, laying a strong emphasis on the verb—"I've had one already."

"Well, Lizzie, I'll get you as many cherries as you want, and Tom Marchmont can eat all he picks himself," and, suiting the action to the word, Jacob pulled a cherry and put it to Lizzie's lips. They began to pout at once.

"Grandpapa said *Tom* was to pick me some cherries. I won't have none of your's." These were all the thanks that Jacob got.

"You are a naughty, spoiled child," he said angrily, as he

took hold of Lizzie and gave her a little shake. Lizzie began to cry. Tom ran up to her with some more cherries, but now Jacob's evil passions were thoroughly aroused, and he was resolved that Lizzie should not have them. He held her tight, regardless of her screams.

"Let her go," said Tom angrily, and he tried to push Jacob away.

"How dare you presume to interfere with me?" said Jacob, and he held Lizzie the tighter.

Lizzie's sense of oppression attained a height to which it had never risen hitherto, but vainly she cried and struggled as Jacob held her in his stronger grasp.

"Come, Lizzie," he said, kissing her, "I'll give you a nice swing, and I've got a pretty book for you at home if you'll leave off playing with that naughty boy."

"I don't want no book—I shan't let you swing me—I don't love you—let me go," and Lizzie's shrieks mounted up to something truly piteous.

"What right have you to hold Lizzie against her will," said Tom, as he made a second attempt to push Jacob away.

At this moment the Quaker's form appeared.

"Lizzie, Lizzie, whatever is the matter?" he called out as he hurried up to her.

"She was angry with me, sir," said Jacob, "for wanting to swing her."

"Oh, Lizzie!" said her grandpapa reprovingly, "I shall

think you are getting spoiled if you show such wilfulness as this. Don't you know that little girls ought to be very much obliged to those who are willing to be kind to them. Don't ever let me see this angry temper again."

Tom was boiling with indignation at hearing Lizzie thus reprimanded, and yet he knew not how to take her part. Jacob's assertion had been in some measure true, and if he had lodged a complaint against him at all, he felt it must have been more on his own account than on Lizzie's. He therefore kept a most unwilling silence as the Quaker took his grand-child's hand and walked her back to the house, telling her it was time for her to go to bed, and expressing a hope that she would wake up a better girl on the following morning.

CHAPTER XI.

SINKING TO REST.

Two more summers had succeeded one another, and now Mrs. Cox was feeling sensibly the burthen of seventy years. She had hitherto been singularly free from malady, and had always done her part towards helping on the yearly income. The first warning had been failing sight, and now a general feebleness came over her which proved to be the forerunner of death. The old woman had led a very blameless life, and it seemed as if it might truly be said of her that she had injured no one. As she lay calmly and peacefully waiting her change the words that fell from her lips betokened truer wisdom than is possessed by many who, in the pride of their superior intellect might have been led to scorn the unconscious teaching of this humble Christian.

The last scene came, though Nancy had striven her uttermost to put it off.

“Don’t wish me to stay longer,” the old woman said, as her daughter stood sobbing over her on the departure of the doctor, who had just warned her that her time was short. “My life would now be a weariness to myself and a hinder-

ance to you. I may hope, may I not," she added with the somewhat doubting accent of true humility, "that I am going to my Saviour. I am a poor sinner, I know, but God is merciful."

"If there is no mercy for you, I think none of us can hope for any," said Nancy. "But one looks for mercy from him who suffered that he might save us."

"That is my only hope!" said the old woman, with the smile of expectant immortality lighting up her soft features. "Tom, be a good son to your mother, she has been like many daughters to me."

"I will," said Tom, sobbing as he spoke, and he pressed his grandmother's cold hands, and stooped down to give her a last kiss.

The old woman's death created no sensation, and the world was hardly conscious of her departure from it. There was, though, one household in which her memory was cherished, and where honest tears were shed for her loss; and if Molly could in death have spoken her wishes, she would have claimed from the living no more than what she got.

CHAPTER XII.

NANCY'S DIFFICULTIES, WHICH THE QUAKER SOLVES.

TOM had just attained his eleventh year. There was a retired schoolmaster living in the village, Dobson by name, who for a small annual salary had been giving him an hour of good teaching every day. However, the old man had been persuaded to remove into a town some miles away, to live with a married daughter, who thought her father too feeble now to live alone. This change gave Nancy considerable anxiety, for her means would not allow of her paying much out of it for her son's education, and she knew she was totally incompetent to help him herself in the way of scholarship. All she could do was to exert her influence with her son to induce him to work industriously alone. However, Tom in a very short time acquired a thorough dislike for those studies which, under Mr. Dobson's intelligent guidance, he had found rather pleasant than not. He could never bear to vex his mother, so for a couple of hours each day he consented to work in a way with his books, while Nancy sat by his side and employed herself with her needle. It must be admitted that of the two Nancy's labours told the most, and that

for three whole months Tom's stock of learning did not increase.

The Quaker had only two children living, a son and a daughter. His son was growing rich in America, while his daughter, Mrs. Lindsay, was in the West Indies with her husband. They, too, enjoyed a competency, though they were not actually rich. John Brown felt, however, strongly that his first duty was towards his daughter and her children, and on this account he was slow to propose any scheme for helping his *protégé* which might tax his income too much. His wife was sure to go with him in his kind and benevolent plans if she felt they were just; and so when John Brown was a little undecided himself he never had any hesitation in applying to Martha for counsel.

"That is a promising boy of Nancy's," he said to her on Tom's eleventh birthday, as he was tying up a book which he was just going to take to him. "I'm thinking it's a great pity he doesn't go to school."

He made a pause and then went on.

"I should be sorry to act unfairly towards any of those who stand nearer to thee and me than he does, but I have been considering whether I could, without wronging them, give Tom the advantages of a good education."

"Well, John," said Martha, "thou must know thine own affairs best, but anything thou wishest to propose in that way I am willing to second. Nancy has behaved admirably to my

mind ever since I have known her, and she is just the sort of person one would be glad to help if one could."

"Then the thing's settled," said John: his benevolent countenance lighted up with the pleasure his wife's words afforded him. "I'll have a talk about it at once with Nancy."

The Quaker took up his hat and stick, and his well-known knock was heard by the inmates of the cottage at an unusually early hour. Nancy and Tom were in the parlour, Tom at his books, and Nancy at her work.

"Good morning, Nancy," said the Quaker on entering. "What, thou hast not quite given up thy studies," he said, addressing Tom. "I know thou lovest a bit of play, and I'm glad to find thou art fond of thy book as well. I have brought thee one for thy play-hours, and I have an invitation for thee both from my wife besides. I am come, too, to ask thee, Tom, whether thou wouldst like to go to school."

"I should very much," was the reply.

"Thy mother would miss thee no doubt, but I am sure she would spare thee if she knew it was for thy good," and the Quaker turned to Nancy for confirmation of his words.

"I should be very willing to spare Tom," said Nancy, slightly colouring, "but I am afraid it would be too expensive a thing to send him to a school that his father would have liked."

"Of course the expense has to be taken into account," said the Quaker, "but Martha and I have been talking about

that, and I think I could afford to give Tom some schooling for two or three years."

The Quaker was most warmly thanked by Nancy and her son, and it was arranged before the former took his leave, that after the holidays Tom was to become a day-boarder at the same school where Jacob Birch had already been in training for some years. This school had a great reputation, and was kept by a clever and a worthy man of the name of Saunders.

After the Quaker had made such handsome reparation to Miss Birch for Tom's misdemeanour, that lady had had the magnanimity never again to allude to the subject in his presence. Nevertheless she had felt more and more strongly the necessity of keeping her tenants at a suitable distance, and she had acted most consistently with these convictions. She had induced the Dates so far to adopt her views as to promise that they would never think of visiting Nancy on anything like terms of equality. Miss Birch's religious sentiments exactly coincided with the Rector's, whereas the Quaker was not considered by him to be as yet among the number of the elect. Miss Birch had therefore the argument all to herself in that quarter.

Though Captain Bamford had been vainly endeavouring for some time to increase his intimacy with the widow, yet as Miss Birch was in total ignorance of these aspirations on the part of her own supposed admirer, she had deemed it un-

necessary to caution him at all. She had come to an understanding with Mrs. Brown that when she and her sister called at Rosebank, they were to be at once informed if Nancy and her son were there, and John Brown received such hints from his wife as kept him from ever descanting on the merits of the two in the presence of Matilda.

The strife therefore which the widow had been so innocently the cause of seemed to have quieted down when this new freak of the Quaker's, as Miss Birch termed it, caused a renewal of angry feeling on her part. She felt, however, that it would be useless to expostulate, but she did the best she could under the circumstances. She invited her nephew to her house the day before the school re-opened, in order that she might warn him thoroughly against the danger to which he would now be exposed of getting into low company. Her directions to him were ample and explicit. He was on no account to have anything to do with Tom Marchmont. Jacob gave his aunt a ready promise that he would attend to her caution, though with the full intention of breaking it on the first convenient opportunity. Tom had not been at school many hours before it was made known to all the boys, through the instrumentality of Birch, that the new arrival lived in a cottage of his aunt's at Aubrey, and that his grandmother had been a washerwoman. Numberless hints were in consequence thrown out by Jacob's friends and associates to the effect that they knew all about Tom's

relations, and that they looked upon him as a fellow altogether beneath them.

The Quaker had given his young friend a very solemn exhortation the day previous to that which was to commence his school career.

"Thou wilt not find things at school so smooth as thou hast found them at home," he said. "Thou wilt come in the way of many a bad boy who loves the evil rather than the good. Perhaps thou wilt have to bear many taunts. Thou art a brave boy, I believe, and I think thy nature would lead thee to return an insult with a blow. Thou wilt be a braver one still if thou meetest it with the pity it deserves, for it is only the pitiable and the low nature that delights in the infliction of pain. Whenever thy spirit is put up and thy blood gets hot, control thyself if thou can't 'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.' Evil natures delight most in tormenting those on whom their efforts meet with most success. Be indifferent to their attacks and they will cease before long."

Tom promised obedience to his old friend's injunctions, and his promise was most sincerely given. In conformity with it he bore the insults he received the first day with all the self-possession of a hero, and all the patience of a martyr. The Quaker's exordium was still fresh in his mind. However he felt out of heart as he walked homewards, and thought

that if things went on as they had begun, he would gladly give up a school life altogether.

Tom's quiet way of bearing the taunts that were put upon him led his persecutors to suppose that he was a fellow of a poor spirit, on whom they might heap with impunity as many indignities as they pleased. In Master Birch's opinion too, whatever his aunt Matilda might think, it was a piece of rare good luck to have such a butt whereon to expend his own bad feelings.

On the following day, as the boys all went into the playground, where Tom was intending to amuse himself as well as he could alone, Birch insolently came up to him. "What business have you here?" he said, and spat in Tom's face.

"As much business as you," was the immediate retort, and a tremendous blow on the chest of his persecutor followed the words.

The blow was of course returned. Birch was three years older than Tom, and so he had the advantage of the latter in size; and feeling confident of victory in the contest that was going to ensue, he already thirsted for some of his adversary's blood. Tom had on his side great personal strength for his age, and this was backed by a proud and resolute spirit which had been bitterly wounded, and which was now determined on revenge. He forgot the Quaker, he forgot his mother, he forgot everything in the fury of the contest except that he would conquer or die. The

boys crowded round, those who expressed any opinion siding at first with Birch. As the fight progressed there were shouts of "Well done, Marchmont—you are a brave fellow—keep at it!"

"No need to tell him that!" was shouted by another and a more commanding voice—it was that of the head boy. "Come, there has been enough of this."

Tom kept on all the more resolutely. He was set upon conquering his adversary and nothing should, if he could help it, interfere with this determination. There was a tremendous shouting heard at last. Tom had fairly brought Jacob to the ground. The conqueror was borne home in triumph so bruised and bleeding that it was hard to recognize him. Nancy was terribly frightened when she saw him.

"Don't be alarmed, mother, I'm not much hurt," were Tom's first words, expressed in the hope of pacifying her fears, however his appearance so utterly belied them that they failed of the desired effect.

"He got into a fight," said Howe, one of the boys, "but it was the other fellow's fault—come back among us, Marchmont, as soon as you can," and he and the rest hurried back to their studies.

Nancy felt constrained to express some amount of displeasure, out of deference to the Quaker's previous advice—however, no woman feels really angry with her son for showing spirit, and so her reproofs were hardly sincere.

As soon as the Quaker heard of the catastrophe he was determined to investigate the matter.

"How is it Tom," he said, "that I see thee in such a plight? Did I send thee to school merely to fight?"

"No sir," said Tom, "but I don't see how I could help it." He then exactly narrated to the Quaker how it had all occurred.

"Well, Tom," he said, "thou knowest I am a man of peace, and in this respect I would wish to see thee such as I am. I cannot blame thee though in this affair—for I believe at thy age I should have done the same myself."

"I hope, sir," said Tom, "I shall never be driven into doing anything of the kind again."

"It is not likely," the Quaker replied, "thou has made too good a fight to be quickly forced into another, and I depend upon it, Tom, that thou wilt never thyself be the provoker of a contest."

Tom gave the wished for assurance with much sincerity, and the Quaker's regard for him remained undiminished.

When Tom was sufficiently recovered from his wounds and his bruises to allow of his returning to school he was struck with the altered demeanour of his comrades. Wood, the head boy, took him under his especial patronage. Instead of his being looked upon as the grandson of a washerwoman, report now spoke of him as being well connected, and the popularity which he had so suddenly and unexpectedly won continued his throughout his school career.

CHAPTER XIII.

POOR IS THE TRIUMPH OVER THE TIMID HARE.

Four years and a-half had elapsed since Tom first went to school, and the Christmas holidays were just commencing. The Quaker had decided on keeping him there for two years longer, and then he thought Tom might enter his office, and in time take a share in the business.

There was nothing that Tom enjoyed more in the holidays than a ride on Jeannie Deans, the Quaker's high-bred mare. The Quaker had until latterly been himself fond of riding, but during the last year or two he had been getting indolent in this respect, and so he was often glad now to have Jeannie exercised by Tom. There was a boarder at the school with whom Tom had got very intimate. Mr. Howard was a man of landed property, who lived in the neighbourhood, and who with a pack of harriers and ten sons, had found it necessary to study cheapness as well as efficiency in the education of the latter; for though the hounds were thought to need no other training save blows and hard uswage, yet these came expensive, considering that servants had to be paid for administering them. Harry was

ninth on the list of sons. His one idea of enjoyment during the holidays consisted in hunting and shooting, and though not much older than Tom, he had already been well initiated in these sports. Tom knew himself the delight of having a scamper across the turf on a well-conditioned steed, but Harry assured him that such enjoyment was tame compared with that of hunting.

Young people's minds are (happily in many respects) not much given to analysing, and Tom was just now dwelling on the ecstatic pleasure which, as it seemed, was to be derived from clearing hedges and ditches and five-barred gates, while gallantly following the hounds. The mental picture went with him no further. Harry had been very anxious to get a promise from Tom that he would meet him some day on the hunting-field, and the latter had arranged to do so if he could get the loan of the Quaker's mare.

On the day that the school broke up, Tom went with his mother to Rosebank.

"Well, Tom," said the Quaker, "I suppose thou wilt be looking out for some rides on Jeannie Deans now thou art at home. She's wanting exercise, and thou wilt find her a little hard to manage just at first."

Tom's colour rose, as it always did when he was going to ask a favour.

"I shall be very glad to get a ride on Jeannie Deans," he said, "may I ride her to the hunt to-morrow?"

The Quaker looked serious.

"Thou wantest Jeannie Deans to hunt with, dost thou!" he said.

"It *was* my wish," said Tom, blushing higher and higher, "but it is mine no longer if you object."

"Didst thou ever see a hare?" inquired the Quaker.

"Yes," replied Tom, a little surprised at the question.

"And what didst thou think of poor puss when thou sawest her?"

Tom was fairly puzzled what to say.

"And what didst thou think of her when thou sawest her?" pertinaciously inquired the Quaker.

"I have often liked watching the hares in the field leading out of the wood," replied Tom, who was feeling obliged to say something.

"Did they ever frighten thee, or worry thee in any way?"

"No, sir."

"Then why should'st thou wish to make sport out of their fears and dying agonies. Fancy thyself with some forty or fifty cannibals all eagerly pursuing thee for the sake of tearing thee in pieces after enjoying the sport of hunting thee down. Though it might be sport to them thou wouldest find it none to thyself, and I suspect if the poor dumb hare or the fox could speak, they would each say the same. I could never find it in my conscience, Tom, to help thee to a taste for sports that inflict unnecessarily the agony of fear and pain

or anything. We have been told by inspired men of old that the earth is under a curse, and we see the effects of it on all around us. We cannot fathom the divine decrees, but we may be sure that this curse and the consequences of it are through the devil's agency and not of God, and that we shall be doing far better in lightening the load of misery it has engendered than in adding to it. The laws of nature oblige us to take life, but though this painful necessity exists we may still do it mercifully. Remember what God requires of us all—to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him. The sports of the field and of the turf and thy associates there would help thee ill to follow these commands, and my advice to thee is to keep away from them altogether, for I believe that by so doing thou wilt become a better Christian and a better man."

Tom uttered not a word himself, but he took to heart every one of those which the Quaker had spoken. As they were walking homewards in the clear moonlight, Nancy said to her son, her pale sweet face wearing a look of unusual earnestness as she spoke—

"I hope, Tom, you will never forget Mr. Brown's advice to you. I have often had the same thoughts, but I should hardly have ventured to denounce myself what so many worthy gentlemen take pleasure in. I am glad though that our good friend has spoken so plainly, for I am sure you will never be the one to gainsay his words."

"Never," said Tom, with all the emphatic earnestness of a generous-hearted boy. It was but a short answer, but Nancy felt it to be sufficient.

Tom's holidays passed quickly and pleasantly enough, though none of them were spent in the hunting field. The Quaker showed his anxiety to make up for this disappointment by giving his young friend more entirely the use of Jeannie than he had ever done formerly, occasioning thereby many remarks on the utter absurdity and folly of such proceedings, together with sundry dismal prophecies as to the effect such ill-judged indulgence would have on Tom's nature morally.

Before the holidays had ended, the Captain's long experienced desire of getting some kind of footing in Nancy's humble abode was accomplished.

One day Tom had gone to visit a schoolfellow, and, in his absence, Nancy walked over to Fulham Farm for the double purpose of paying Mrs. Jones a visit, and of procuring some of her fresh eggs. It was decidedly not from his mother that Tom had inherited the gift of personal courage, nor had all his efforts been successful in infusing into her one particle of his own. In passing through a field on her way home, a bull unexpectedly made his appearance, and though he did not show any symptoms of hostility, yet he frightened poor Nancy dreadfully. She was therefore intending to retrace

her steps, and to perform a great circuit for the purpose of avoiding him.

It chanced that the Captain was at much the same time returning from his walk, and was mounting the gate leading into the field at the moment when Nancy was turning her back upon her fancied adversary. Here was a fine opportunity for the Captain to act the part of a modern Don Quixote, by defending a fair and helpless lady from an imaginary foe. He availed himself of it instanter, and by dint of promises and assurances that the bull should do her no harm, he induced the widow to walk by his side through the enemy's ground.

The Captain was so gallant that having once constituted himself Nancy's protector, he would not desert his post until he had fairly seen her into her own little domain. On quitting her he made her a low bow, saying as he did so that he hoped to call on Tom on the following day, and she felt that she could not do otherwise than thank him for his kind attention.

Tom, who had always thought his mother's behaviour to the Captain most unfriendly, was delighted to welcome under her roof one who had been kind to him from his childhood, and whose songs and stories he had so often listened to with rapture, and this hearty welcome accorded to him by the son emboldened the Captain in his efforts at an intimacy with

the mother. Women, unless single, are seldom altogether free agents, and though Nancy would have herself preferred being spared the visits of her nautical acquaintance, yet the evident pleasure which these visits afforded Tom, induced her cheerfully to bear with them.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISFORTUNES.

Another year had rolled silently on, and yet another, and the Christmas holidays had just commenced. It was to be Tom's last quarter at school. In a few months he would be eighteen, and the Quaker, who was feeling less able for his work than he had been formerly, was looking forward to the pleasure of having his young friend fairly established with him in his office.

John Brown had enjoyed good health throughout his life, and now that he was getting more infirm, the one bone of contention between him and his wife consisted in his not, to her mind, taking sufficient care of himself. He would laugh at her lectures, and as regarded his health she could never drill him into habits of obedience, though perhaps it was the one point on which the good woman exacted any. John had an inveterate dislike to changing his boots when he came in, if they happened to be wet, and it was only by dint of herself bringing his slippers, and standing with them in her hand till they were put on, that his wife so far succeeded in having her wishes complied with.

Mrs. Brown was gone one afternoon to see a friend who lived at a distance. There came on a tremendous storm just as her husband was leaving his office, and he had to walk through something approaching to a river on his way home. His feet were thoroughly soaked. The servant brought his slippers and laid them by his side. He had carried a weekly paper with him, and there was an article in it which he was much interested in reading. From one article he went on to another, and he had been at his employment for about an hour when his wife came in.

The first thing she did on entering was to go up to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

As he looked up, "Why John," she exclaimed, "you look flushed. Good gracious! to think of your sitting here all this time in your wet shoes!"

She was on her knees at once, pulling them off, though she found it a difficult task, as they had shrunk from the thorough wetting they had received. John's feet were like marble. He confessed to not feeling very well now that he came to think about it, but he was certain his wet feet had nothing to do with his uncomfortable symptoms. He laughed at the idea of going to bed, and sate up till his usual hour. All the night long he was tossing about and unable to get any rest. The doctor was sent for, but his remedies had not the desired effect. The Quaker had never been really ill before, and the fever seemed to take the stronger hold on him

in consequence. In three days that gentle, loving spirit had left a world of selfishness and strife, and was wafted, we will hope, to climes more congenial to it.

Mrs. Brown never held up her head again. The two had been united for well nigh half-a-century, and the troubles they had struggled through in the loss of children and other adversities seemed to have knit their hearts the closer. Their only living son had recently come to England on a visit, and he had been just in time to see his father breathe his last.

Rosebank was to be the widow's for her lifetime, and after her death it was to go to Joseph. When spoken to by him on the subject, Mrs. Brown expressed a wish to end her days there, adding that she did not think she had many left. Her words proved true.

On Nancy and her son this double calamity fell most heavily, and they both experienced in all its vehemence that sorrow which is felt by loving hearts when dearly valued friends are taken from them. To the widow, indeed, the loss might have been overwhelming, were it not that she had still a son who was now fast growing into manhood, and whom she could for the future depend upon for support.

Mrs. Brown had left directions that her son was to have the charge of her two grandchildren, till he was able to deposit them with their only remaining parent. Mrs. Lindsay

had been carried off some years back by yellow fever, and the widower had in consequence entertained all the greater dread of having his daughters exposed to the dangers of the climate. He was himself busily engaged in the management, of his affairs, and though he had often sighed for a reunion with his two remaining treasures, yet he had conceived hitherto that a stern necessity prevented it.

Jane bore her two bereavements quietly and patiently, though she felt them deeply nevertheless. Lizzie's sorrow was a good deal more demonstrative, and she showed less willingness than did her sister to accept her allotted portion. She thought it a hard case that she should have to go and live with an aunt whom she had never seen, and she entreated Nancy to let them be with her as long as they remained in England. Lizzie had no idea of happiness out of the village of Aubrey, and there she wished to stay. Nancy was the woman she had always loved most after her grandmother, and Tom had been the same to her as a brother. Her request, pleaded with tears, had of course to be refused, and Joseph Brown, after arranging some business matters and effecting a speedy and satisfactory sale of his father's beautiful abode, left Aubrey with his two nieces.

The Quaker's personal property was most of it in the Barking Bank where Nancy's little all had, by his advice, been likewise deposited. On the death of his widow Jane and Lizzie succeeded to the greater part of what John Brown

had left. Fifty pounds had been bequeathed to Tom which was paid by Mr. Joseph Brown into Nancy's hands before his departure.

The very day after the arrival of the two girls at their uncle's temporary residence in town Lizzie penned a long letter to Nancy. It was not written in a philosophical spirit but at fifteen few have learnt to take patiently their allotted portion when they find it an unpleasant one. She could never, she was sure, she said, love her aunt, and she did not think Jane could either, though the latter had not actually said as much. She hoped Nancy would soon let them come and stay with her. The little room above hers would be just large enough for them both. She could not bear the town, and she was sighing already for the green fields. If Tom would go and pick some of the sweet blue violets out of the garden at Rosebank she and Jane would be so glad to have them, for it would be a recollection of home.

Lizzie's request as regarded the violets was eagerly complied with, and they were enclosed in as comforting an epistle as Nancy's warm and affectionate heart could indite. Mrs. Brown thought fit to read Nancy's letter, and she was offended at the desire on Lizzie's part which it unfolded of getting away from her new protectress. Mrs. Brown had never had children of her own—she was a woman devoid of imagination, and it was not in her to throw herself into the heart of the young girl and to participate in her feelings. She had no fear

about Jane, but she expected much trouble from Lizzie. The old nature had evidently not been subdued in her, and she must set herself to the task of conquering it. She was rather pleased at the thought, for she was a woman who wished to carry out to the uttermost that high aim of doing good in her generation. It was only to be regretted that in this instance as in so many others the plan adopted should have been a mistaken one.

"I am afraid," she said to Lizzie severely, as she handed her back her letter, "that you have never yet been properly trained in the principles of your duty. Had you been so - your expressions to your friend would have been full of thankfulness rather than of discontent. You are fortunate in being with one who will do her best to give you profitable instruction, and I hope that you may soon so far improve as to feel grateful for receiving it. I have no objection to your writing occasionally to your friend, but I must stipulate that you never do so except under my supervision, and that you endeavour, before going to your task, to enter upon it in a proper frame of mind."

These words were gall and wormwood to Lizzie, and in no way helped on that moral and religious improvements which Mrs. Brown was anticipating.

CHAPTER XV.

MISFORTUNES NEVER COME SINGLE.

NANCY thought it desirable that Tom should remain at school until he heard of something in the way of employment. She had an idea that his first start in life, now that he had lost his generous friend, might be attended with considerable expense, and so she was more than usually industrious, for she wished to be prepared for any unusual drag upon her purse. Nancy had never been strong, and her constant application to work as she sate in her cottage alone was telling on her. Tom often noticed his mother's wearied look when he returned from school in the evening, though she was never too tired to give him a bright smile when he appeared.

It chanced to be a holiday at school. Tom and his mother had just finished their morning's repast, when Mr. Date's knock was heard at the door. His countenance on entering betokened calamity.

"Have you heard any news?" he inquired.

"None," said Nancy anxiously, for she was startled by the question and the tone in which it was asked. "I believe

you had your money in the County Bank," continued Mr. Date nervously.

"Yes," said Nancy with a gasp.

"Then I am sorry to tell you you have lost it all. The bank has failed, and I am afraid they have nothing for their creditors, not even a shilling in the pound."

Poor Nancy looked thunder-struck, and for a few minutes not a word was spoken.

"We must make the best of it, mother," Tom said at last as he rose, and seating himself close to her took her hand in his. "I have had a good education, and that with perseverance will, I am sure, enable me to push my way, and I hope in time to make you more comfortable than ever you were."

Nancy tried, but in vain, to look at her misfortune as cheerfully as her son wished her to. With him youth and health and hope served to keep all fear and despondency away, while his mother's more timid and delicate nature was in no ways suited for the rough contest with the world which it seemed as if it would be now their destiny to undergo.

Mr. Date after kindly begging his parishioner to let him know if she wanted any immediate help, took his leave, and as soon as they were left alone Tom turned his attention to the best means of meeting the disaster.

"I must give up school at once," he said, "and look about

for something to do. It is very fortunate that we did not pay my fifty pounds into the bank."

"It is," replied Nancy getting up something of a smile. "But you know twenty pounds of that is already gone in paying for our mourning and the Christmas bills besides."

And with the thirty pounds that are left it will be hard indeed if we cannot manage to live comfortably until I get some fixed salary."

"I have the rent to pay in a day or two," observed his mother in a desponding tone, "and then there is your schooling besides."

"Only a month of it, dear mother. My own five pounds will do more than pay for that." The Quaker had given Tom a five pound note on Christmas day, and the latter had been reckoning on making a few presents with its help before he left school. "I think," he went on, "it would not be a bad plan to put an advertisement into the *Barking Gazette*. A fellow at our school got a capital situation by this means. I'll write one at once," and Tom sate down to his task.

"There," he said, rising when he had done his work, "I think that will do," and he read the few words to his mother. Then kissing her, he added—"I will take it at once to the post, and you must come with me. A little fresh air will do you good."

"I don't think I ought to waste any time, Tom," she pensively said, "with work in the house for which, when completed, money can be obtained."

"Mother, I won't let you work your eyes out," said Tom, authoritatively. "I suspect you have been doing that too long."

"But Tom," pleaded Nancy, "I *must* work. It will never do for me to depend on the small sum that is left us," and her words were ended with a sob.

"But you must and shall depend upon it till I am lucky enough to get employment. I will go and fetch you your bonnet. It will save you the walk up-stairs."

Nancy would not agree to the latter proposal, but she embraced her son, telling him as she did so that he was worth more to her than any amount of money.

"I should like to put my letter into the Granton Post-office," said Tom, when his mother re-appeared. It is safer, and it will be a nice walk besides. I dare say we can both do without dinner till we come back."

Nancy assented to her son's arrangement, saying there was nothing in the house but a bit of cold meat. They went straight to the Post-office, where Tom deposited his letter. Then, with his mother leaning on his arm, he deviated a little from the direct road homewards. He had got his five-pound-note in his pocket, and now an unusual fit of extravagance seemed to come over him.

"Mother," he said, as he passed the poulterer's shop, "we have had rather a weary morning of it, and I've a fancy that a good dinner will do us both good."

He went into the shop and changed his five-pound-note without, however, having greatly diminished its amount.

Tom put his purchase into his wallet, which he carried on his back, and which had hitherto been made the recipient of stones rather than of food. This affair arranged, “You must come with me,” he said, “to Wood’s for a bottle of port—a glass will do us both good, and I am sure you have been living too low and working too hard of late.”

Nancy would not say nay, though she was positively terrified at the price demanded and given for the wine. A spirit of recklessness had, it seemed, come over Tom, and he resolutely resolved on defying care. Good spirits are infectious, and Nancy had caught a little of her son’s.

They were not back till long after their accustomed dinner-hour, for Tom had purposely lengthened their walk. On their return his purchases had to be cooked, and he had contrived to gather together so many items, that it was a lengthy process. Nancy had to give her mind to it entirely, and Tom protested when the meal was prepared that it would be a sort of reflection on him should his mother eat of it but sparingly. She satisfied his requirements, and, fortified with a glass of wine, she felt strong enough to do any amount of work. She took it from the drawer, but Tom snatched it out of her hands.

“No, mother,” he said, “I will have my own way about that work of yours. Your eyes want rest, I’m sure of that,

and it shall not be touched till you have got them all right again. Let us have a game of back-gammon, if you can't manage to get on without doing anything till ten o'clock."

They were in the midst of their game when a messenger called with a letter. It was from Mr. Date, and was couched in the following words :—

DEAR TOM,

Our cousin, Miss Jenkins, has just arrived. She tells me she knows for a certainty that her brother was this morning in want of a clerk. It strikes us it would be a capital opening for yourself, and we recommend you to lose no time in applying for the situation. You might start by the seven o'clock coach from Granton to Barking. Camm is ten miles beyond, and you might come back direct by the coach that passes your door at eight o'clock. I enclose you a letter of recommendation, in case you should like to avail yourself of it, and am,

Yours truly,

R. DATE.

Tom's delight was excessive at the receipt of this note. Nancy also began to be really hopeful. "I must be off by a little after six," he observed, before retiring for the night, "but I need not disturb you. I may not find Mr. Jenkins at home, and in that case it might be worth while waiting till he returns. There is the London mail which must pass somewhere near Camm, I must avail myself of it if I am too late for the Camm coach, so you must not be alarmed if I am not here much before twelve. Don't stay up for me,

and you had better keep Lucy to sleep here, for you may be getting nervous if you are left all alone." Lucy was a girl who came in every day to do the rough work. "And mother," he added before he bade her good night, "do take a walk to Fulham Farm to-morrow while I am away. It is a long time now since you have been there."

Nancy could not resist the desire she had to preside over Tom's early repast, though she knew she would get chided for doing so. It was a cheerful morning in the beginning of March; the sun was just rising, the birds were singing, and all went in unison with his own feelings, as our hero started on his somewhat long expedition, armed with the Quaker's large stick. (This stick had been the old man's constant companion in his walks, and had at his death been given by his widow to Tom). His father had not felt more hope in the idea of emancipating himself from thraldom by adopting the roving life of a sailor than Tom experienced just now in the prospect of spending his days and years in an attorney's office. There was none of that romance in the idea which had tinged the shapings of his father's destiny, but then there was the solid reality of his thus becoming independent, and of providing something of a maintenance for himself and his mother.

It was about one o'clock when Tom arrived at the lawyer's offices. His courage had always failed him when about to ask a favour, even though the Quaker himself were the person

from whom it was solicited. He gave therefore a nervous rap, very unlike the thundering peals with which the solicitor's door was occasionally assaulted by the footman of his clients. He asked for Mr. Jenkins and was informed by one of the clerks that that gentleman was very much engaged receiving the rents of an old client, that he was not expected back before six, and that most probably he would be later. "If it is on any legal business you have called," Mr. Frump added, "I might perhaps give you some assistance."

"It is on no legal business," replied Tom. He longed to ask whether the object of his walk were likely to prove a successful one, but his informant did not look like one to whom he would wish to be confidential, so taking up his hat and stick he said he would return at the time the smart official had named.

There was an inn on the opposite side of the street, which Tom went into to procure something to eat, and to inquire about the mail which would now be his one means of getting back that night. He was told that the nearest point for meeting it would be at the inn at Norman's Bridge, a place six miles off, and that the Coach always stopped there to change horses at half-past eight.

"There is a way by the fields and lanes, sir," his informant added, "which would shorten the distance by a mile, but as the country is strange to you there might be a chance of your missing it."

In spite of Tom's buoyant, hopeful nature he could not help entertaining sundry misgivings as he sauntered about the streets. He had no friend's house to go to, no money to spend in the shops, and he found a difficulty in disposing of his time. He determined therefore on whiling away the tedious hours by finding this shorter cut, and by means of making one or two enquiries on the road he succeeded. On his return he sat in a field about half-a-mile from the town and waited there till the slow motion of the hands of his watch brought them to six. He rose and soon he again made his appearance at the office.

"Has Mr. Jenkins returned?" he inquired, trying to assume an air of indifference as he again addressed the would-be fine gentleman.

Mr. Frump took a survey of the stranger from head to foot, and the survey told unfavourably. Tom's clothes were not of the newest cut, and Mr. Frump's manner became supercilious.

"Mr. Jenkins is not returned," was the reply given in a curt and off-hand manner.

Mr. Frump's insolent demeanour roused Tom's spirit, and without waiting to be asked he seated himself on a chair, and placing his hat on another, and his stick between his knees, he made a very successful effort at looking as if there were no one in the office but himself.

In the course of half an hour Mr. Jenkins arrived.

Tom rose at once respectfully, and entered straight into the business on which he had come.

"I am very sorry," said Mr. Jenkins, who seemed to be a kind-hearted man, "but I have, I believe, this morning suited myself. There are so many applicants for any vacant situation, and the first comer has of course the prior claim. "How do you return?" Mr. Jenkins added in a tone that evinced a kindly feeling for the evidently disappointed boy.

Tom explained to him his intentions.

"Then I am afraid you have not much time to spare," said Mr. Jenkins, taking out his watch. "I should have otherwise offered you some refreshment."

Tom thanked him for the kind intention, and then hurried away to relieve himself by a sob or two. He had been feeling their losses more than his mother had supposed. Mr. Jenkins's observation with regard to the numerous applicants for employment seemed wofully to have diminished his own hope of success in seeking for it, and his heart sank within him. As he wended his way towards the Bridge he thought he had never in his life before felt so tired. His weariness seemed, however, to lend rapidity to his steps, and it was likely he would have some little time to wait before the coach arrived.

He was just passing from a field into the lane which led into the high road when his ear was startled by a noise like that of a pistol, and he just descried in the darkness two men

attacking a third, who was crying for help. The thought of highwaymen came across Tom's mind with all the force of certainty. With a sudden spring and a tremendous blow following it, he brought one of the assailants to the ground. The other turned upon him, and there seemed for a time to be a life and death contest between the two. Our hero was nearly being overpowered, for the ruffian whom his first blow had stunned had just risen, while he could look for no help from the man he was defending.

At this moment, his ear caught the welcome sound of wheels. It was heard by the highwaymen also, and as they found they had got a stiffish kind of antagonist to deal with, and were hardly aware of Tom's failing strength, or of the amount of injury they had done the gentleman whom it had been their intention to rob, they decided that a rapid retreat would now be their best line of tactics, and in a moment they had disappeared

The conveyance turned out to be a spring cart containing a farmer and his son, who had driven out of the main road in order to give an order to a labouring man who lived at the end of the lane. The stranger was warmly thanking Tom for the service he had done him when the farmer having arrived at the spot, pulled up his horse and alighted.

"Why Sir, that ain't never you," was his exclamation.

"Yes it is," was the reply, "and if it were not for this

fine fellow here I should not, I believe, have a breath now left to answer you."

The farmer made Tom a low bow, which was returned.

"You carry a good stick," he observed, "and it seems to have done you good service too. I am afraid as you are both badly hurt. I'm sorry as my vehicle will only hold one of ye."

"Then let it be of service to my preserver," said the elderly gentleman. "We are not far from Maplewood. I think you had better drive him there, unless his own home is hereabouts."

"Oh never mind me," exclaimed Tom. "I have only got to go as far as Norman's Bridge, and I can walk very well. I am expecting to meet the coach there, and I am afraid I have not many minutes to spare;" and Tom made as if he were going off at once.

"Stop, stop!" shouted the wounded man resolutely, "I cannot allow you to go without at all events learning your name."

"My name is Marchmont," replied Tom.

"Marchmont!" exclaimed the old gentleman, "that is a name familiar to me. May I ask you for your card?"

"I have no card," replied Tom. "I live at Aubrey, some thirty miles off," and Tom again made his interlocutor a parting bow.

"Here, stay," said the other eagerly. "If you decline my

hospitality, I must insist on your allowing my tenant or his son to drive you to the inn. Here Jim, help this young gentleman up, and then you can order some conveyance there for myself."

"Certainly, sir," said the young farmer, while Tom whose only hope of catching the coach lay in this opportunity of being driven to the place of rendezvous, was mounted in an instant, and then driven rapidly away. Mr. Dawson himself remained with his landlord, who, while waiting the arrival of the expected conveyance, had a conference with his tenant as to the best means of tracking the thieves, interlarded with regrets that he had not compelled his deliverer to accept of a night's hospitality from him. Mr. Dawson seemed persuaded that the young man would have still declined, and that his injuries were not sufficient to make a journey by coach in any way painful.

Tom was however more hurt than he had at first supposed, and it occasioned him considerable satisfaction when he found that the inside of the coach was empty. He at once got in and just had time to thank the young farmer for saving him from the inconvenience of being too late, when with a flourish of the whip the coach and its passengers were gone. The inn where the coach stopped was about half a mile from the village, and Tom walked home as rapidly as his bruises would allow of his doing. He had proposed taking the key of the house with him and of letting himself in, but Nancy

had declined giving her assent to this proposal, saying that not under any circumstances would she go to bed till he returned. It was with considerable trepidation that he knocked at the door.

"I'm late, mother," he said cheerfully, keeping a little in the back ground as Nancy at once opened it. "I've had an adventure, and a lucky one too," he went on as he came into view.

"Oh Tom;" exclaimed Nancy in an accent of terror, for his face was covered with blood.

"I'm not badly hurt, mother," said Tom, "I've just had a cut or two in saving, I believe, a man's life."

Nancy forgot all about the object of her son's walk in her anxiety to listen to his adventures, and to discover the extent of his injuries. It was in vain Tom assured her that a surgeon's help was unnecessary. She slipped out, and was at the baker's shop before Tom was aware of her intentions.

Mr. Braid had been up late at his work, and was only just shutting up as Nancy arrived. At her request he went off at once for Mr. Griffin, who put Tom into a state of comparative comfort, though he warned him that he would have to lie by for a time. On the following day a respectable looking man appeared at Nancy's door with a message from his master, who had sent him purposely to inquire after Tom, and to express his regret that he should be incapacitated from call-

ing in person to thank him for the service he had rendered him the night before.

"Master's hurt uncommon bad," he observed to Nancy, "and I expect as it will be long afore he's set up again, if so be as he ever comes round at all. He'll be sorry to hear as your young gen'l'man is laid up likewise."

"You may tell him," shouted Tom from his own room where he had been listening to the conversation, the door being open, "that I have only got a few cuts and bruises, and that I am very sorry to hear that he has come off so much worse than myself."

"I will, and thank ye," said the man as bowing to Nancy he departed.

CHAPTER XIV.


BETTER PROSPECTS.

For some time Tom had to submit to looking very disreputable, though his cuts and bruises were not such as to give any occasion for alarm. They, however, brought about an increase of intimacy between the captain and the widow, for day after day did the former call to inquire after Tom and to have a chat with him, and as the old sailor's attentions to her son were evidently pleasing to Nancy it was with a bolder and yet a bolder step that he strided up the garden walk to pay his accustomed visit.

At the expiration of a week Tom found himself able to be about again, and now he lost no time in seeking afresh for employment. He accordingly put an advertisement into the *Times*, to which he got an immediate reply. Mr. Parsons, his correspondent, offered him a situation in the Plymouth dockyard at eighty pounds a year, should he find on further inquiry that the applicant was likely to fill the office satisfactorily. At Tom's request Mr. Date undertook to write a letter of recommendation which was deemed sufficient, and

it was arranged that in a fortnight's time Tom was to enter upon the duties of his new position.

It was with a decided feeling of satisfaction that Miss Birch received from Nancy the notice of her intended departure. Though she believed there would be no difficulty on the death of Mr. and Mrs. Brown in keeping her tenants in their proper places, yet she entertained a notion that it would be an advantage to the village when Tom was fairly out of it. Her nephew had thoroughly imbued her with the idea that his former school-fellow was likely to turn out ill. This opinion had been accepted with all the greater avidity by the aunt as she gained by it in her own estimation the credit of being a true prophetess. She had warned the Quaker over and over again that his mistaken kindness would be the ruin of the boy, and Jacob's assertions were merely confirmatory of her own words. She thought it would be only right to call on Nancy, ostensibly to take leave of her, but in fact to give her a few words of caution about her son, with an admonition or two to himself should she be fortunate enough to find him at home. A visit from Miss Birch was a most unusual honour, and she was placed by Nancy in the chair of state which stood against the window. After a few preliminary remarks Miss Birch observed,

“I am glad that Tom has yet the chance of so fair a start in life. He will I hope prove himself not unworthy of such good fortune.”

"I have no anxiety about Tom," said Nancy, a mother's pride and confidence in her son giving a sort of nobility to her features as she spoke.

"Mothers seldom do have any anxiety about their sons," observed Miss Birch in a tone that seemed to betoken some danger at hand. "This is a great mistake, and often renders them incautious. You will, I hope, look carefully after Tom. It will be very necessary I can assure you, when you have got him located in a large sea-port town where you may be sure there is plenty of temptation for a young man to fall into if he thinks fit, and I don't see that there is any reason for supposing Tom to be more proof against it than others have been."

To these alarming hints and inuendoes Nancy thought it best to make no reply, though they caused her to wish heartily that her landlady's visit were at an end. Miss Birch was sitting with her back at the window, and was using much action with her hands and her head while giving Nancy her sentiments. It chanced at this moment that the object of her discourse was nearer than she supposed. Tom had just entered the garden on his return from his walk, and on catching sight of the visitor's shawl and bonnet he resolved that he would, if possible, avoid an interview with the owner of them. He, therefore, took off his shoes on entering with the intention of stealthily creeping up stairs, and awaiting in his own room the departure of their landlady. His

purpose was, however, frustrated ; for Miss Birch, finding it was impossible to get into any further argument with Nancy, and feeling that she had carried out as much as she was able of the purport of her visit, had just now risen to depart. Tom, therefore had only time to put a shoeless foot on the first step of the stairs when he was startled by Miss Birch's appearance. His first idea was to take five steps at a time, and to disappear at once ; however such a proceeding might have looked like a shame-faced and cowardly retreat, so he changed his mind and manfully resolved on confronting one who from his childhood upwards he had been in the habit of regarding in the light of a foe. Tom's peculiar position was construed by Miss Birch into a mark of deference for herself—and it worked a wonderful change in her feelings towards him. Instead of admonition she was willing now to accord him praise. "I am glad," she said, "to see that you have learnt such good manners. I am so often annoyed at the young men where I visit, for coming into the presence of ladies without paying due attention to their dress. I always say, though, that the fault is in their mothers for not teaching them a proper respect for their betters."

A compliment was the last thing Tom was looking for, and it came so unexpectedly and was so unwelcome that he was at a loss for a reply. He was trying to come to a decision as to whether he had better proceed in his intended ascent or remain quietly where he was when Miss Birch, warmed

into a fit of generosity by the good intentions she had been giving him credit for, thus proceeded.

"I have a very pretty little carpet bag at home which once belonged to my father. As I perceive your habits are so neat I shall have much pleasure in giving it to you. I think it will do nicely for the conveyance of your slippers and papers to and from your office."

Nancy had to tender to Miss Birch her son's thanks for the promised gift, while that lady was just now feeling so charitably disposed towards Tom that she was willing to excuse his silence on the plea of bashfulness. On her return home she informed her sister that misfortune had much improved Tom Marchmont, and that she began to entertain hopes of his turning out eventually an orderly and well-conducted young man. To the widow likewise was conceded a fair amount of praise, though the dawning popularity of the latter proved eventually to be but short-lived. The carpet-bag arrived at the cottage shortly after Miss Birch left it—neither did it arrive empty. Inside was a brown-paper parcel containing "The whole duty of Man," with a few words of kindly admonishment from the giver. Tom's first idea was to send back at once both bag and book; however, his intentions were over-ruled.

"They were sent you out of kindness," was his mother's gentle remark, "and what is kindly meant should be kindly taken."

Both gifts were in consequence retained, though Tom acquired at once the habit of looking upon them as his mother's property and not his own.

Fortunately for the widow's finances Miss Birch found an immediate tenant for her house, and fortune seemed again to smile both on herself and Tom.

CHAPTER XVII:

A PROPOSAL.

AMONG the inhabitants of Aubrey there were none who took so deep an interest in the intended departure of the Marchmonts as did Captain Bamford. He was one into whom Miss Birch had never been able to infuse her own notions as regarded differences of rank, though from a disinclination which he at one time entertained for getting into active argument with that lady, she conceived that she had made a proselyte of him. A change, however, had come over the Captain's feelings, and Miss Birch's jurisdiction had for some time been growing intolerable to him. At the time of his first acquaintance with her she had appointed him Secretary to her Book Society, Mr. Date having positively declared that he had not time for the work. When the proposal was made the Captain had not found the courage to refuse, though he did find the duties which the office inflicted on him greater than he could well bear. There had of late been so great a falling off in allegiance on his part that Miss Birch had felt constrained to give up the hope of enticing him into the chains of matrimony. Instead, how-

ever, of bending under her disappointment, as she might have done in former years, it seemed to give her strength to hold herself yet more erect. She assumed a domineering tone towards her former supposed admirer, spoke to him seriously of the useless life he was leading, and tried to insist on his going round the parish to procure subscriptions for her African and other missions. The Captain upon this flew into open mutiny, gave up the Secretaryship, and declined all invitations to future tea-parties on the plea that they interfered with his dinner. Miss Birch hinted at ingratitude. The Captain at once assumed a look of astonished inquiry, and asked what he had to be grateful for. Miss Birch was taken at a disadvantage, and had nothing to say in reply; and as the Captain took up his hat and marched out of the room, after wishing her a good morning, the ill-will she felt towards her antagonist was in no way mollified by the fact of his having had the last word.

There was a reason for this remarkable change on the Captain's part from docility to utter rebellion, of which Miss Birch was not in the slightest degree aware. He had been nurturing a growing, though as yet a silent admiration for Nancy. From the day on which he had first succeeded in effecting an entrance into the widow's cottage, all desire on his part to keep up his footing as an intimate at the villa had vanished. Finding that the hope of winning Nancy was fast driving from his bosom all lingering partiality for

Rebecca, the Captain decided, like an honest man as he was, on letting the altered state of his feelings be seen in his acts.

This new launch of Tom's, as the Captain termed it, was to him a subject of the deepest importance. He would be off his mother's hands, and the old sailor might have wavered about giving shelter to the son, much as he liked him, though he had no hesitation in deciding that Nancy's presence in his small household would be to him a most valuable acquisition. He determined at all events on trying his luck, and he laid his plans accordingly. The Jones family were acquaintances of the Captain as well as of Nancy, and as both the farmer and his wife made it an invariable rule to press upon their visitors a portion of that abundance which they possessed, each had before now benefitted by their hospitality. It was a pleasant walk to Fulham Farm, and the Captain planned taking it in Naney's company. To effect his purpose, he determined on getting an invitation from Mrs. Jones both for himself and her. He had a nephew staying with him, and on this nephew he rested his hope of finding an opportunity of declaring himself. There was to be a formal introduction between the two young men who were to be companions on the road, and by this means the Captain depended on having entire possession of Nancy's ear for the time being. This plan took a whole evening in concocting, and on the following morning the Captain informed his

nephew that he was going out on business, but that he should not be very long away.

His walk lay in the direction of the Farm.

"Good morning, Mrs. Jones," he said on entering. "I want a few of your eggs and some of your butter and cream if you can find a messenger to send it by. I have a nephew with me, a young fellow who is not much used to country life, and such cream as yours I should suspect he has never tasted."

"Then he shall have some of the best as I've got," said Mrs. Jones very graciously, "and I'll send it before you have your tea."

"Thank you, Mrs. Jones," was the Captain's rejoinder. "Perhaps you won't object to my bringing Harry here some afternoon. He enjoys a walk in the fields and the sight of cows, and I should like him for once in his life to go inside a really comfortable well-kept farmhouse."

Mrs. Jones made a low curtsey, and seemed much gratified by the compliment.

"Harry has brought me some of the real Mocha coffee, continued the Captain, who now felt assured he was making his way rapidly in the worthy woman's good graces. "I must get him to give you a little of it. You can tell, I know, what good coffee is; and there's no one I'll be bound, thirty miles round, who could produce such berries as those Harry has brought."

Mrs. Jones opened her ears at the announcement of such a present. She had the art of making coffee, and she was proud of it, and here was a chance of showing her skill under the most favourable of circumstances, while she could tell her various afternoon visitors exactly how she came by so rare a gift.

"I am much obliged to you, Captain," was her reply. "I shall be proud of some of your nephew's coffee, and if you and he will come and try what justice I can do to his present, I shall have all the more pleasure in accepting it."

"I shall be most happy to bring him," was the Captain's immediate reply. "By the bye," he added, "what a loss we shall have in Mrs. Marchmont and her son. Has she been calling here lately?"

"She was here the day her son was at Camm," was the reply, "and I went t'other day to inquire after him. I was glad to find him so well recovered."

"He's a fine fellow, is Tom," observed the Captain. "I'm sorry to think he'll so soon be leaving us."

"Tom was always a favourite with me," was Mrs. Jones's reply. "I hope as he'll come here some day afore he leaves."

"I shall be most happy to be the bearer of any message to him," said the Captain. "I shall be taking my nephew to call there on my return home."

"Then why not ask them both to come out with you to-morrow evening?" said Mrs. Jones.

"That I will and gladly," said the Captain, and having gained his end he took up his hat and departed, forgetting entirely that butter and cream had been the professed object of his visit.

On his return home having brushed his hair and hat afresh, he hallooed to his nephew, who was measuring by paces the extent of his uncle's domain, for lack of better occupation.

They set off together for Nancy's cottage, the Captain looking considerably the most got up of the two. She and her son were at home, making preparations for their intended move which was to take place in a couple of days. The Captain very gallantly delivered his message, and the invitation it contained was readily accepted. Nancy was so entirely innocent of his intentions that she did not notice how much of admiring gallantry there was in his manner as he addressed her, and when he expressed his warm wish that Harry and Tom should be friends, her face brightened up with pleasure. She had already heard all particulars about the Captain's nephew, and she thought it a compliment to her son that his friendship should be desired by a young man holding a royal commission.

The Captain took his departure in high good humour. He decided in his own mind that Nancy's happy look was occasioned by the lover-like attitude he had begun to assume, and this decision made him all the more eager and anxious that his apparently so far successful endeavours should be

crowned with victory. He was anxious likewise to infuse into the mind of his nephew a portion of that admiration for Nancy which he was experiencing himself.

"A worthy woman that," he said with an air of paternal solemnity, as the two were walking homewards.

"Very," said Harry, who cared but little about Nancy's worth, and who was as ignorant of his uncle's intentions as was the object of them.

"I want you to have a little talk with poor Tom," pursued the Captain. "He has never left this village, and is very ignorant of life. I expect he will find it a wonderful change when he gets to Plymouth."

"And what is he going there as?" inquired Harry.

"Why the poor fellow has not much interest," replied the Captain, colouring a little, "and so he's obliged to take what he can get. He's a thorough gentlemanly fellow, and I wish they could find something better for him than the position of a clerk in the Dockyard."

"A clerk in the Dockyard!" exclaimed Harry, and his opinion of his new acquaintance fell at once at the news. He could have borne with the cottage—his mother lived in as small a one—but to go into a profession that was voted ungentlemanlike by every fellow who knows anything, was an offence, in Harry's eyes, hard to be got over. He was a good-natured fellow enough, but he had sufficient *esprit de corps* to feel that holding as he did a commission from his

Majesty it would be slightly lowering to his dignity if he were to associate freely with a clerk belonging to the Plymouth Dockyard.

The Captain, anxious to remove the unfavourable impression which the knowledge of Tom's future position had so evidently produced, began to narrate, somewhat copiously, to his nephew the details of his young friend's recent gallant action. The history did not, however, weigh very heavily in the balance in Tom's favour, for Harry felt that under similar circumstances he would have done much the same thing himself. He was in fact beginning to find himself considerably bored with Tom and his heroism, though he avoided giving a hint to this effect to his uncle.

Harry was the Captain's only nephew. Mr. George Bamford had died early in life, and had left his widow and child in poor circumstances. The Captain had shown them both kindness at the time of his brother's death, and his house had been their home until Mrs. Bamford's own relations in Ireland found one for them nearer to them. The Captain had seen nothing either of her or of Harry from that time till, when finding recently that his nephew was at Plymouth, he wrote to ask him to come and see him. Mrs. Bamford had expressed a wish that he should go and do what he could to please the kind friend and relative who had housed them both when in their trouble, and Harry was doing his best to carry out his mother's views

in this respect. Seeing therefore that it was his uncle's desire that he should be civil to Tom, he thought it as well for once to pocket his pride. He was besides glad of any thing that would help to while away the time, so he proposed offering himself as a companion to the future clerk in a walk that very afternoon. For this accommodating proceeding he got a hearty slap on his shoulder, and the proposal being made to Tom, it was readily accepted. Harry too had come to the conclusion, before taking leave of his new acquaintance, that Tom was not a bad fellow after all, and he heartily wished that he had himself interest enough to get him into a more creditable position.

Five o'clock was Mrs. Jones's tea hour, and the Captain cheerfully made up his mind, on this occasion, to suit his own arrangements to hers. He put his dinner forward a whole hour, and hoped to have a glass of grog on his return home, and to drink Nancy's health in it as his betrothed.

There was a sound of continuous brushing in the Captain's sleeping apartment for fully half an hour before the three o'clock dinner. His dress apparel, which had been put aside ever since the time when the Richmond Villa tea parties had been first found objectionable, was again brought out by the Captain for the farm entertainment. Two beautiful lillies of the valley, the products of his little conservatory, graced the old gentleman's button hole as, punctual to the hour named, he knocked at Nancy's door. He was bent on not passing

the Miss Birch's residence, which they must have done had they gone the most direct way. Complaining therefore of the dust and of the delight of being in the fields at that season, he prevailed on Nancy to lengthen her walk by well nigh a mile, ostensibly to avoid the road. The garden at the back led at once into the fields, and the Captain, as he opened the little gate, gallantly placed himself by the side of the widow, saying as he did so, "I always like leaving the youngsters to themselves." Then waving to the two young gentlemen to pass on he found himself, for the second time in his life, in solitary companionship with Nancy. The task he had given himself proved a more difficult one than he had expected. He was a man totally unused to sentimental talk, and he conceived it to be an essential ingredient in the art of love-making. Indeed he was convinced that his first and last attempt at making a proposal had proved a failure from its bare matter-of-factness. With Rebecca Birch this kind of thing might have done, but it was different with Nancy. The captain had a notion that to her an offer should be made, if not in poetry itself, at all events in poetical prose. He had been all the morning studying Sterne's sentimental journey, but he had got nothing from it save a confusion of ideas. He would have wished for sentiment to flow from his lips like a stream, but the source from whence it should spring appeared just now to be dried up altogether. He hummed and hawed and played with his watch-chain.

Nancy saw his embarrassment, and supposing it proceeded from a want of sufficient ideas to ventilate she did her best to help him to a few.

The captain, by degrees, got a little bolder, and ventured on expressing his extreme regret at the thought of losing her and her son. While giving utterance to this feeling he and his companion passed the lane leading into the road in front of Richmond Villa.

Nancy, in the simplicity of her heart, assured the old gentleman in reply, that *both* she and Tom would be very sorry to leave their various kind friends.

"You'll miss your garden a good deal," said the Captain ; "I'm afraid it's not much in the way of flowers that you'll see at Plymouth."

"I am afraid not," said Nancy. Then turning her honest eyes towards the Captain's button-hole, "I have been admiring," she said, "those two beautiful lillies."

This unlucky remark roused at once all the Captain's dormant eloquence.

"If you will accept them and wear them near your heart —where I should myself wish to be," he said, his voice rising to the solemnity of the occasion, as he handed Nancy the flowers—

There was a slight rustle and a little shriek of horror. The Captain turned round, and close behind him who should he behold but the two Misses Birch, looking as if they had

found him in the commision of the most heinous offence.
All the Captain's high-flown eloquence departed.

"God bless me!" he exclaimed, in a tone of irritation he had never ventured on before in the presence of his imperious neighbour; "I didn't expect to see you here."

"As little did I expect to come upon the strange scene I have just witnessed," replied Miss Birch in a tone of solemn objurgation; "and I regret much having intruded upon it;" and the outraged spinster made as though she were going to perform a considerable circuit in order to avoid further proximity with the two thus taken by surprise.

"I should be very sorry to hinder Captain Bamford from joining such old friends," said Nancy, who was just now feeling as much annoyed by her landlady's impertinence as she had been startled previously by the Captain's declaration. "There is my boy in front waiting for me," she added; "I hardly know how we came to get so far separated;" and Nancy swept past the Misses Birch with a more dignified air and manner than she had been in the habit of asserting, though there was a feeling of intense vexation in her heart.

Deserted by the one to whom he had trusted for support the captain's plight was truly pitiable. He looked exceedingly foolish, again betook himself to his watch chain, and then made an ineffectual attempt at conciliating Snap who, like his mistress, was fond of having a snarl at him. Miss Birch did

not help him to recover his self possession, but seemed rather to do her utmost to add to the poor man's confusion.

"Well, Captain," she remarked, after a silence of a minute, as they strolled along, the old gentleman feeling like an unwilling captive, "you have kept your intentions very close, and I only hope you may not find you have been made a fool of."

"Madam," said the Captain, now fairly driven to extremities, "no woman shall presume to interfere with my private affairs. I beg to wish you a very good morning;" and he stalked on in pursuit of the companion with whom he had started.

On rejoining Nancy he tried in vain to catch her eye, and to read in it one responsive feeling. She seemed suddenly to have changed into an icicle, and the Captain felt, without a word being uttered, that his hopes had vanished. The alteration in his dinner hour and the want of his customary glass of grog made him uncomfortable, and he was not an amiable addition to Mrs. Jones's tea party. The coffee was acknowledged to be excellent, and yet it shed no exhilarating influence over his nerves, and after the clatter of putting away the tea things was concluded, he felt his position to be so uneasy that he requested the farmer to take a stroll with him, nominally for the sake of smoking a pipe. The two young men followed the elder ones out of doors, and Mrs. Jones with her sister and Nancy were left to represent the tea party.

"The Captain seems dull this evening," observed Mrs. Jones.

"I dare say his early dinner has put him out," said Nancy, hoping she did not colour as she spoke.

"Perhaps so," said Mrs. Jones, "but I think it more likely as he's going to have a fit of the gout. I always knows when its coming on with the master, he gets so cross."

Nancy readily adopted Mrs. Jones's view of the subject, and they turned their attention to other things. The Captain walked straight home, requesting the former to excuse him to his wife; and to his enemy the gout was imputed by all, save Nancy, the Captain's shortcomings on that eventful evening.

The Captain's rejected addresses brought the object of them into considerable disrepute. On the following morning Miss Birch called on the Dates, and while there she hinted mysteriously at certain improprieties which she had been witness to, and then, sagaciously nodding and winking, she sincerely hoped that for the Captain's sake her tenant might never again be induced to return to the village. Mrs. Date, who was a lady of weak nerves, took alarm at once, and as she neglected to inquire of Miss Birch for more exact particulars, her imagination, which was a vigorous one, supplied the place of facts, and it pictured Nancy as one among that dangerous class of women who by their artifices

make dupes of men, and win thereby the deserved hatred of their own sex.

The Captain too was thoroughly out of humour with Nancy. His pride had been touched to the quick, and he had not time to recover his wonted equanimity when Tom appeared to take his final leave. His manner was in consequence yet more freezing to the son than the mother's had been to him. The uncle's altered demeanour brought more prominently before the nephew the fact that a clerk in the Plymouth Dockyard could never claim, by right, the position of a gentleman. It suddenly struck him, therefore, that he had allowed Tom to be too familiar, and his manner became just a little superecilious. It was, in consequence, but a short visit that Tom paid, and his own pride felt wounded as he walked homewards.

Mr. and Mrs. Date called while he was away to bid adieu to Nancy, and though they were both too good-hearted to do or say anything that was positively unkind, yet they contrived to make Nancy understand that she was hardly to presume for the future to look upon them as friends, except in the most general acceptation of the term.

"You will write us a line," Mrs. Date said, somewhat stiffly on taking leave, "and I hope you will be able to tell us that you are comfortably settled, and that Tom is getting on well."

Nancy promised that she would. She accompanied them

to the garden gate, as if anxious to put off the final separation. There was a tear in her eye as she re-entered the little home that was so soon to be no longer hers. She would gladly have won, if she could, some expression of regard from the worthy Rector and his wife, but nothing of the kind had they bestowed upon her, and a sense of solitariness had come over her in consequence. However Tom came in, and in soothing down his feelings of vexation she forgot her own.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SEPARATION.

With her son's strong arm to lean upon, Nancy bore up bravely against the struggle, which it must always cost the heart of an affectionate woman, when she leaves her home of many years. She remembered but little of Plymouth, and to find lodgings would, she expected, prove a tiresome undertaking. The Morgans had left the place long ago, and she had no friend there now to help her. However Tom took the responsibility of finding suitable apartments on his own shoulders.

"Mother," he said as they passed a pastrycook's, after having just deposited their luggage at the inn where the coach stopped. "Mother, you look tired—come into this shop and get some dinner and take some rest, and I'll find lodgings before I come back to you."

"Is it lodgings you are wanting?" said the woman in the shop, "I think as I could recommend you to some, if so be as you don't require a great deal of accommodation. An honester, tidier woman than Mary Goodman never breathed, and I'll warrant you'll find none cheaper in Plymouth for the comfort of them than the rooms as she have got to let."

Upon further inquiries it sounded as if Mrs. Goodman's apartments might just suit, and having obtained the address, Tom hurried off to get a sight of them. He found them what they required, and he took them on the spot. There was a fine ocean view without—a kindly pleasant face within, and cleanliness in every corner.

"We have left our boxes at the inn," said Tom when he had settled about the terms, "I will go for them at once. Will you kindly get the rooms ready as quickly as possible. My mother is very tired, and she will, I am sure, be glad to feel settled."

Mrs. Goodman promised to do her best. Tom called at the pastrycook's on his way to the inn, and with something of boyish glee he told his mother of his success. "You look very tired," he said as he stooped to kiss her. "The rooms won't be ready just yet, and you must not stir till I come back to you."

Tom was some time away, for he determined on having things put a little straight before he allowed his mother to enter their new abode.

"Now mother," he said as he at last reappeared, "Come along, I've got a cab outside, and the sooner we start the better."

Nancy smiled languidly, as her son helped her into the vehicle.

"But where are our boxes?" she said.

"Oh, they are already there, and now we have only got to follow them."

"I think I could have walked," said Nancy, while she felt how pleasant it was to be saved further fatigue. The labour of packing, and then the journey had been a little too much for Nancy, and she really needed rest.

The little sitting-room looked quite cheerful as they entered it, while the smell of the tea as it was brewing in a brightly polished teapot was most refreshing.

"Now," said Tom as he placed a chair for his mother, and then seated himself by her side in front of the tea-tray, at which he intended to officiate, "the only thing you have got to do is to make yourself as comfortable as you can."

Nancy smiled her assent, and a cup of tea and the fresh smell of the ocean soon revived her, though a tear fell from her eye as she looked on its wide expanse and thought of that one loved form that lay buried underneath.

Tom entered on his new duties with great zeal and energy, and things wore a prosperous aspect. The sea air seemed to have a renovating effect on his mother. She was no longer anxious about their affairs, for Tom, if he did well, was sure to rise and get an increase of salary from year to year. She could not feel solitary during the day with so kind a person as her landlady in an adjoining apartment. She had always the enjoyment at six o'clock of welcoming her son on his return from his work, and he was generally her companion

for the rest of the evening. Tom did not find his employment either interesting or exhilarating, but then it enabled him to render his mother comfortable, and this thought gave a zest to his sedentary labours.

It was with infinite satisfaction that on one sultry evening in July he brought her home his first quarter's salary. It was hot, sultry weather, and he had arranged that a trifle out of his twenty pounds should be spent on a boating excursion, which he had invited their landlady and her husband to join. It was a beautifully calm evening and they all found it so pleasant a change from the hot parched land to the cool water, that they were tempted to go a good way out. A tremendous storm came on, and it was with difficulty they could get the boat again on shore. On landing they were all wet through. Nancy had during the last winter been suffering from a cough, and this wetting brought it back. As the autumn advanced it got worse, and at last Tom and Mr. Goodman together prevailed on her to see a doctor. When Mr. Johnson came he ordered wine and other expensive luxuries which Nancy would have gladly done without, but Tom's resources seemed inexhaustible, for each thing was procured at once. Mrs. Goodman did all she could for the invalid in the way of kindness and attention. However her doctor's skill, her son's wishes and prayers, her landlady's kindness, all were of no avail, and Nancy felt herself that she was not long for this world. One day when Mr. Johnson called she

asked him to tell her candidly what he thought of her condition.

"I believe," he said, "I have been buoying up your son with hope too long, but I have not had the heart to refuse him what he so earnestly asked for. I am afraid your end is fast approaching. Still, while there is life there is hope."

"I feel that for myself there is none," said Nancy; "I would willingly go if it were not for Tom."

She stopped, a large tear and then another rolled silently down her cheek.

"However," she added, "he is young—he will get over it—but I cannot break it to him myself."

"I shall less like breaking it to him than to you," said Mr. Johnson. "However, I feel it is a duty from which I must not shrink."

"Tell him," said Nancy, "I am happy in the thought of a re-union with one from whom I have been so long separated. Poor Tom ! He has too tender a heart for a man."

"I wish that were a more general fault," said the Doctor. "The tender and unselfish love of a son may well awaken an honest pride in the heart of a mother, and prove, on her death-bed, the greatest of earthly consolations."

There was a greater brilliancy in Nancy's eye, and a warmer flush on her cheek, as these words were being uttered.

"I think," she said, "Tom was never by nature selfish,

and I do feel that in early life I did my best to hinder him from becoming so. I sometimes fancy now that it is I that am selfish at his expense. But hark! I hear his knock. Will you go and speak to him?"

Mr. Johnson met Tom in the passage, and asked of him an interview in the little sitting-room. Tom turned very pale as he followed the doctor in and then shut the door. He did not venture to ask any question, so Mr. Johnson had to speak first.

"Your mother wishes me to tell you my opinion of her state," he said in a hesitating voice. "She has given me a hard task to perform, but I feel I must fulfil it. As far as I can see there is no hope left."

"Why not?" said Tom, in the accent of one who would hope on still if he could. "She looks better than she did a week ago. She has more colour ——"

"Yes; but it is a colour that betokens death. I have told her the truth and she has borne it bravely; take a lesson from her and do the same."

To this exhortation there came no reply. Tom walked to the mantel-piece, put his elbows on it, and with his face hidden by his hands no one could discern what emotions were at work within. For a few moments there was a silence in the room which the doctor felt to be painful. Tom raised his head at last, and as he turned his head towards the Doctor his face was of an ashy paleness.

"Then there is no hope," he said, and his lips quivered as he spoke.

"None," said Mr. Johnson.

"But you will come again?" Here Tom broke down quite.

"I will come constantly till all is over. God bless you!" and the Doctor took a hasty leave.

Tom went into his own room, washed his face, and then appeared at his mother's bedside.

"Mother!" he said, taking her hand, and with a look that seemed to implore her to offer him the consolation which Mr. Johnson had denied him—the consolation of hope.

"My own dear son," sobbed Nancy. Her arms were clasped round his neck and their tears were mingled.

"I am unwilling to leave you," she said, when she had a little recovered her composure; "but it must be as God wills. You will, I hope, have other interests by-and-bye. You will find some dearer companion to supply my place. May she love you as your father was loved by me."

"I won't hear of that," said Tom impetuously. "If I can keep you I want nothing besides. Doctors always take the worst view of things. I believe, myself, that you will recover if you will only do what you can for yourself."

"I would do anything I could for your sake," said Nancy. "What is it you would have me do?"

"You must keep up your spirits," was the reply, "for

that's the chief thing. I shall get Dr. Hunter to come and see you. Two opinions are always better than one."

"Stay," said Nancy, who, even as the last great change approached, was still careful for her son's purse, "I cannot allow you to involve yourself in so unnecessary an expense. If there were any hope of recovery I would let all be done that could to bring it about; but I feel—I know there is none. We must part, Tom, and it would be a great relief to my mind if you would promise me that you would bear the trial with resignation."

"I will do all that you wish as far as I can," said Tom, in a tone that did not betoken resignation as yet.

Nancy longed to give her son a drop of comfort; for, as she looked in his face, she pitied him.

"I may recover," she said, "'for while there's life there's hope.' If I die you will have the consolation of remembering that for many years my chief happiness has been in you."

It was the first portion of his mother's speech that Tom caught at.

"While there's life there's hope," he murmured. "I will not lose you if I can keep you here."

He gave her a long embrace, and then disappeared. He looked in on Mrs. Goodman on his way down, and asked her to remain with his mother while he was away.

Dr. Hunter lived close at hand. Tom knocked impatiently at the door.

"Is Dr. Hunter at home?" he inquired anxiously of the servant.

"No sir," was the reply.

"When will he be at home?" Tom asked yet more anxiously.

"I cannot say."

"Will you tell him as soon as he comes in that there is a case requiring his immediate attention, at No. 10, ——— Terrace."

As Tom turned his steps homewards the unjust impression was on his mind that doctors were never at home when they should be. He found Mrs. Goodman sitting with his mother on his return. Nancy looked inquiringly into his face.

"Dr. Hunter was not at home," he said, "but I have left a message to say he is to come as soon as he can."

Tom's face looked flushed with anxiety and excitement, and it pained Naney to look on it and think what bitter sorrow was preparing for her son through her. She took his hand and pressed it tenderly. Tom was resolved that his mother should live, and so, returning the pressure as tenderly as it was given, he appealed to Mrs. Goodman for confirmation of his hopes.

"I have been fancying that my mother has been looking a little better during the last two or three days," he said, in a tone that begged for assent to his observation.

"Ah, Mr. Marchmont," was the answer, "we must all die; and it's a blessed thing when we can, like your mother, leave the world contentedly and in the full assurance of the faith."

"I wish you would not talk like that!" said Tom reproachfully. "It's just the way to make mother think she has nothing to do but to die. I shall not give up hope myself until I hear Dr. Hunter's opinion."

"And I am sure no one can hope more than I do that it may be a favourable one," replied Mrs. Goodman. "I've always said to John as your mother's too young to die yet; but there's many as dies younger, and we must all be ready when we're called. 'Tis no use fighting against death, Mr. Marchmont."

"And no use helping it on by talking so much about it," said Tom. "We'll change the subject," and he made a languid effort at starting something fresh. It was all in vain. There was a silence which Mrs. Goodman would gladly have interrupted by a few more evident truths, but she felt just now as if she could say nothing.

Tom had been gradually edging his chair back. He was feeling miserable and he did not wish his mother to know it. Nancy was straining her neck in order to get a sight of him from her couch. Since her illness had become serious she had acquired a habit of resting her eyes continually upon her son when he was with her.

"Tom," she said faintly, "it won't be long I shall be with you; let me see you while I am here."

In a moment he was at her side. The sobs would rise though he did his best to keep them down.

"It troubles me—the thought of parting from you," she went on. "We shall meet again though, I hope. You will never, I know, forget what have been my wishes all through your life. Try to be a Christian in every thought and act. I feel—I am sure it is the one way of insuring a happy death."

Nancy fell back on the couch, exhausted with the exertion. Her eyes closed for a time. Her son and Mrs. Goodman were watching her anxiously. At last she opened them again.

"How are you now?" inquired Mrs. Goodman.

"Oh! I am quite well now," said Nancy in the cheerful accent of former times. There was a slight gasping for breath—and she was no more.

It was too hard a task to Tom to convince himself at once that his mother was gone. He clung to her, vainly waiting for some indication of returning consciousness, and the appearance of a smile which passed over her countenance seemed to give a reason for his hopes. They were struck down on the appearance at this moment of Dr. Hunter, who walked straight to the couch where she lay.

"She has breathed her last," he said, "I can do nothing for her now."

The tears rolled silently down Tom's cheek, but he said nothing, and the Doctor withdrew. By dint of entreaty Mrs. Goodman succeeded in getting him out of the room, in order that some of the last offices for the dead might be performed, but he soon returned to shed tears of heartfelt sorrow over one whose placid, smiling countenance, showed her unconsciousness of his grief. There was a stillness in the house, a stillness which was, however, too quickly broken by the arrival of his mother's last receptacle, and then again by the sound of the hammer—and who among us knows not the repulsiveness of that sound as, with a monotonous and a hollow stroke, it proclaims the total disappearance from among the living of the being we may most have loved?

There was but little preparation needed for the funeral. Tom with his landlord were the only mourners and, as the former walked by the side of his new, but sympathising friend, with his features firmly set, it seemed as if Mr. Johnson's advice had not been thrown away. As the coffin was being lowered nature would, however, assert her sway; but with an effort known only to himself the mourner quickly resumed his self-control, and walked back to his desolate home with as composed a demeanour as when he had left it. The door was at once opened by Mrs. Goodman, who irresolutely followed Tom to his little sitting room, and looked as if she wished to ask if she might enter. He warmly grasped the friendly hand—broke down in the effort

—and in a moment the door closed on him, and left him in the enjoyment of his solitary grief.

“I only hope as the young man won’t go and commit suicide,” said Mrs. Goodman to her husband as she entered her own apartment.

“He has too brave a heart to do that,” was the reply; “though I don’t doubt as he feels it dreadful :” and the good man sat down and fairly sobbed.

“Poor fellow !” said Mrs. Goodman. “I’ll go in by and-bye, and talk to him a bit. It’ll never do to let him mope there all by himself.”

“You’d better let him alone,” said her husband. “I should say as he couldn’t abear the sight of anyone just now.”

Mrs. Goodman wisely adopted her husband’s advice, and left as he was to himself and his own reflections. Tom did his best to learn the hard lesson of resignation. His own good sense and the religious constitution of his mind helped him on in his endeavour, and he felt he would be honouring his mother’s memory far more by obeying her precepts and by cherishing the remembrance of her worth, than in shedding vain tears, which could bring no comfort either to himself or to her.

Lizzie Lindsay had kept up her correspondence with Nancy, but, as her letters had ceased to be of a confidential kind, they had but little expressed the feelings of her heart. Tom would often complain of these letters and declare that

Lizzie must be changed. His mother had invariably taken poor Lizzie's part, and had said how kind it was in her to write at all. On her death our hero took upon himself the task of writing to inform his old playfellow of the event and by return of post he received the following reply :—

DEAR MR. MARCHMONT,

I cannot tell you what sorrow your letter has occasioned me. I wish I could in any way comfort you, but I know that would be quite beyond my power. Aunt wished to write for me, but I would not let her do that. We are all going away from England. Uncle and aunt to America, and Jane and I to join papa. I shall ask him to write to you when I arrive, and I daresay you will let him hear from you in reply.

I am ever, yours sincerely,

E. LINDSAY.

Tom gave the letter a fervent kiss ; he then put it into the little writing case that had been his mother's, and wondered as he did so whether fortune would ever again bring him across Lizzie's path. Had he known the trouble it had cost that constant friend to gain permission to write at all, her letter would have been yet more precious to him than it was, while the affection that had prompted her to claim that permission would have been one of his dearest remembrances.

Mrs. Date was the one other acquaintance to whom Tom imparted the sad intelligence of his loss. As she and her husband were away from home at the time he wrote, his letter did not receive an immediate answer. The good woman's feelings had been grievously warped by her neighbour's

innuendoes, and so, when it came, it appeared to have been written more for the purpose of admonishing Tom than of sympathising with him. The only sensation, therefore, which it aroused in the mind of the latter was regret that he should ever have brought upon himself the annoyance of such irritating counsels, and now it seemed as if all future connection between himself and the villagers of Aubrey was to be at an end.

The morning after the funeral Tom, after having eaten his solitary repast, knocked at Mrs. Goodman's door.

"I am going to the office," he said, "I shall be back at one."

"La," was the reply—"you ain't never a going to work again so soon ! I think as you should give yourself a day or two to reflect seriously on what has happened, and to compose yourself. I have been a borrowing one or two nice books as I was going to lend you."

"It will be better for me to go to my work at once," said Tom, "though I thank you all the same for your kind thought. It's of no use giving way—it won't bring mother back again——," here his voice failed him for a time. "I'd vex long enough," he went on, "if it would."

"Will you come in in the evening ?" said Mrs. Goodman in a tone which testified to her anxiety that her invitation should be accepted. "It must be lonesome for you to be by yourself."

"Not this evening," said Tom with averted face, "I shall have a good deal to do in settling accounts. Some other evening I shall be very glad," and he walked away.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHANGES.

Tom resumed his occupation as usual, but the spirit which had at first animated him was gone. He had worked for his mother—to earn the means of adding to her comfort, and this object had given a certain zest to his employment. It was all so different now. The sedentary life had become suddenly distasteful to him, and he felt he must change it for something else.

He had no one on his return home, after his long day's work, to whom to communicate his thoughts, but he dwelt on them in consequence with a still greater earnestness. He drank his solitary cup of tea and then paced the room. It was too confined for his long and rapid strides, so he took up his hat and walked out. It was a clear, frosty night, and as he gazed on the bright distant stars his thoughts were released from that bondage in which the four walls of his tiny apartment seemed to have kept them, and he found he could soar in spirit to those loftier regions to which he hoped his mother was already gone. He watched the vessels on the calm ocean, and there was a solemnity in the scene which

harmonized with his own state of mind. There was, he knew, a ship just starting for America. If he could go in it and seek his fortune in another land life would, he thought, appear less irksome to him than it did at present.

But the doctor's bill and the funeral expenses had to be paid. The recollection brought sorrowful remembrances and disturbed the loftier current of his thoughts. He turned his steps homewards. He could no longer endure the little sitting-room, so he soon left and went to bed—but not to sleep. That dreary sense of the weariness of life had come painfully over Tom since his mother had died, and he found it a more difficult thing to dispel than had been his first sensation of overwhelming grief. He rose in the morning unrefreshed. While his breakfast was preparing he wrote letters to Mr. Johnson and to the undertaker, requesting them to send in their bills at once. The doctor's was more moderate, and the undertaker's less so than he had expected. Tom felt thankful however when, on comparing the state of his own finances with the demands he would have to meet, he found that after everything was settled he would still have two or three pounds in his pocket.

To feel sure of not being in debt was to Tom a great matter, and now he decided on speaking at once to his master and asking him how soon he could be emancipated from the thraldom in which he felt himself to be placed. On his return, therefore, to his office he begged for an interview

with Mr. Parsons, told him how distasteful his work had become to him, and expressed his determination of going to America. Mr. Parsons readily acquiesced in Tom's views. He had an especial objection to clerks who only half liked their work, and he had no doubt about getting plenty of applications for the vacant situation. Tom had, therefore, his full permission to go when he pleased. It was with less feeling of weariness that he returned home that evening. He had had an interview with the Captain of the *Bermuda*, and it had been arranged that he was to work his passage out to America. When once there our sanguine friend imagined that success would follow all his undertakings. Men of energy had always made their way in that land of freedom and why should not he ?

Mrs. Goodman's countenance looked full of important intelligence as she opened the door herself to Tom on his return.

"There has been a gentleman here to-day," she said, "of the name of Maxwell, a-making inquiries after you. He gave me his card, and you'll find it on the table. He was for calling to-morrow, but I told him as you only came home just for your dinner ; and then he says, 'Well, if that's the case will you tell Mr. Marchmont that if he'll come and lunch with me to-morrow instead of at home, I shall feel honoured'—yes, that was the word—'I shall feel honoured by his company'."

The name of Maxwell was familiar to Tom by report, though he had but little recollection of the tall, prim looking gentleman, who had, once upon a time, condescended to play at ball with him in the Quaker's garden, and he wondered much how he ever came to find out where he lived.

Before starting for his work on the following morning Tom announced to his landlady his intention of going to sea.

"I'm truly sorry to hear you say that," she observed. "It isn't many as makes their fortunes by a sea life, and John and I both hoped as you'd have got over your loss in time and stayed here for a permanence. I'd have tried to make you comfortable if you'd been contented to stop, and I wish you would have taken a little more time to consider."

Tom felt, and expressed himself as very grateful for the kind interest the worthy woman took in him ; though, he at at the same time assured her that his plans were now too entirely fixed to allow of his altering them.

On his way from the office our hero turned his steps in the direction indicated by his card, and knocked gently at the door of No. 5, — Parade. A mild and venerable-looking man-servant opened it, and on Tom's giving his name that individual seemed unusually anxious to be civil, for with a smile of welcome and a very low bow he ushered the visitor into a handsomely furnished apartment. Tom had a certain general impression of Mr. Maxwell, and the stranger did not at all fulfil it. He was older and not so tall ; but

when he came forward to welcome Tom and shake him by the hand, the latter fancied he had heard his voice before. He felt puzzled and he looked so.

“Perhaps,” said the stranger, “that memorable occasion on which you and I first met is less vividly impressed on your memory than it is upon mine. I was in considerable danger at that time, and I have only recently recovered from the effects of the rough usage I then received. I was sorry to find how much you had suffered, too, in coming to the rescue.”

“My injuries were nothing very serious,” said Tom, who now recognised in Mr. Maxwell, the man whose life he had once probably saved. “I could have wished that yours had been no worse than mine, and that they had left behind as little to remind you of them.”

“They were serious enough to keep me from doing till now what I wished to have done at once—that is to say—from expressing to you in person my thanks for your timely help.”

The old servant came in at this moment to announce that luncheon was ready. Tom, in the hurry and confusion in which he had been thrown, forgot that he had been invited to partake of it.

“You quite over-rate my services,” he said, “I was only thankful that chance enabled me to render you any. But I am detaining you too long. Good morning;” and he made rather an awkward attempt at retiring.

"This is but a hasty visit," said Mr. Maxwell. "I hoped you would have accepted some hospitality from me when you came."

"I am very much obliged," said Tom, suddenly recollecting himself. "I shall be very pleased to remain if it is not inconveniencing you."

The two were soon seated at a more luxurious repast than it had ever hitherto been Tom's good fortune to partake of. Mr. Maxwell testified considerable anxiety that it should not be thrown away upon his new friend; while old Rogers fairly exceeded his master in the profuseness of his hospitality, and was for filling the glass of the favoured guest with more wine than Tom, with his very temperate habits, knew well how to get through.

"I have been a long time in making your acquaintance," Mr. Maxwell observed, as he gave our hero a liberal helping from the dish that was set before him. "I hope now that it is once made it may not soon be dropped. I was at Aubrey a few days ago on my way here. As I found you were gone I called on your clergyman, but he was away too. However, his servant gave me his address and I wrote to ask him for yours. I received his reply only yesterday. He mentioned to me the loss you had so recently sustained, and perhaps I should apologise for breaking in on your solitude at such a time. I hoped though that I might be in

some way of use to you. You seem young to be left so entirely without relatives."

A tear started into Tom's eye, but was hastily brushed away.

"I am told you have a situation in the dock-yard," pursued Mr. Maxwell.

"*I had*, sir," said Tom, "but I have just given it up."

"Have you!" said Mr. Maxwell, in a tone of surprise. "Then I conclude you have something more lucrative in its place."

"No, indeed, sir, I have not. I think, though, that a more active life would suit me better, and so I am going next week to work my way out to America."

"And how long is it since you have arranged all this?"

"Only since last night. It was a momentary thought and I carried it out at once."

"It is one, I presume, that would never have entered your head had your mother been spared you." Mr. Maxwell's manner became much more serious and fatherly than it had been at first.

"Never!" said Tom with emotion. "It was through losing her I ever thought of it all."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Mr. Maxwell, speaking more to himself than to Tom. "It seems to me," he added, again addressing him, "that you want some other friend now to supply her place."

"I can never find that," said Tom with a repressed sob.

There was a pause, which was at last broken by Mr. Maxwell.

"May I ask you," he inquired, "if you are related to the baronet's family bearing your name?"

"I am, sir," said Tom unhesitatingly, "though the relationship between us must now be getting distant."

"And how are you related to them?"

"My great grandfather was a Sir Charles Marchmont—so my mother has told me. My father lost both his parents at an early age. I believe it was in consequence of this that he ran away and enlisted as a common sailor. He was afterwards," added Tom, his manner expressing a feeling of pride as he spoke, "given in acknowledgement of his bravery, and good conduct, a commission as midshipman. He served in that capacity on board the *Warrior* with his former Admiral. My mother never saw him again. The ship was lost with all on board."

"I have been thinking," said Mr. Maxwell, "that the name of your father must have been Charles."

"It was," said Tom.

"Then I can remember the circumstance of his going off—no one knew where, though the affair was so soon hushed up that I had well-nigh forgotten it. You are not, I suppose, personally acquainted with your relations."

"Neither I nor my mother ever saw them."

"I consider that that has been no great loss to you," was the reply. "Mr. Marchmont," he went on, "I look upon you, under Providence, as the preserver of my life, and I would wish to testify my gratitude in some more substantial way than in mere words. You are young enough yet to commence a more desirable path in life than the one you have renounced, or than that on which you have rashly, as it seems to me, entered. There cannot, I think, be much difficulty in your giving up the engagement you have just entered upon, and if you will consent to my doing so I will gladly give you the means of adopting some profession better suited to your birth."

A look of heartfelt gratitude passed across Tom's countenance as the old gentleman was speaking.

"You make my service to you seem very small, sir," he said, "your liberality going so far beyond it. I cannot reject your kind offer, but you must allow me to look upon it more as a free gift than as any return for the help which a fortunate accident enabled me to render you. As to my birth it was, on my mother's side, humble enough, though she was the best of women, nevertheless."

"Give me your hand," said Mr. Maxwell, evidently pleased with his young acquaintance. "You are an honest fellow, I believe, and I am old enough now to prize honesty beyond most other gifts. I consider it a settled thing that for the future you are to look to me for help and counsel. We old

men buy our experience very dear, and it is mortifying when the younger ones refuse to profit by it. The sooner you get out of your fresh engagement the better. Come to me to-morrow at this time, and let me know how all has been arranged. We will then talk over some plan for the future, and remember this, that when once formed, it must not be rashly given up. I am not blaming you for what you have already done," continued Mr. Maxwell, as he observed the colour mounting into Tom's cheek ; "I can sympathise with the feeling which prompted the act. I only wish you to see that it would not do for you to repeat it."

"Certainly not," said Tom, as, on looking at his watch, he found the hands pointing to the hour for his work to commence again. "I must be off," he said. "You would like to see me to-morrow between one and two?"

"At one," said Mr. Maxwell, "and bring a better appetite than you did to-day."

Tom felt overwhelmed with all this kindness, so much so that his own services, compared with what he was going to receive for them, appeared to him ludicrously small. That evening he accepted the Goodman's invitation to tea. They were both delighted at his improved prospects, though, in her heart, the worthy woman would still have preferred his remaining as he was. Captain Sims had, after swearing a little at Tom's changeableness of purpose, agreed to let him off, and when he next made his appearance at Mr.

Maxwell's temporary abode, the reception given him by the latter was more like that of a parent than of an acquaintance of a day. After inquiring how the announcement of his change of purpose had been received by the Captain,

"Well, Tom," he said, "have you thought of a profession?"

"I should wish, sir," said the former, "to be in some way guided by yourself. My father was a sailor — "

"Ah!" said Mr. Maxwell, "I see you have still a fancy for the sea. I am afraid though you are too old now to take to it in earnest and it would, besides, be something approaching to an impossibility for me to procure you a commission. I would, on no account, force your inclinations though, if I were sure of your not tiring of it, I would recommend a college life, which would prepare you either for the Church or for the Bar. I conclude you have had a good education hitherto?"

"Through the kindness of a friend, who is now dead, I think I have had great advantages in that respect," said Tom. "I should be unwilling, though," he added, "to be a continual expense to you. I have nothing of my own, and I thought a commission on board a man-of war would make me independent at once."

"I see it is a sea-life you are longing for," said Mr. Maxwell somewhat testily; "but I have already told you I have no chance of getting you a commission. I never cautioned you against expense, and therefore it is unnecessary your

making that an excuse for not undergoing a few more years of study."

"But I must feel, myself, that I should be cautious about profiting too much by the liberality of a stranger who rates a former service at far too high price. This would, I assure you, be my chief objection to availing myself of your generous offer."

"Then let that be no objection at all," said Mr. Maxwell with restored good humour. "Remember, though, that if you go to College it must be to work."

"I shall never object to doing that," said Tom; "I will work hard enough to earn an independence."

"I am glad to see," said Mr. Maxwell, "that that feeling is so strongly implanted in your nature, and by working well at College for a few years you may, I think, put yourself in the way of soon attaining what you seem so much to desire. There is one thing I must beg of you. It is—that in associating with those who live in a higher sphere than that to which you have been accustomed, but which your father's birth may now entitle you to occupy. You don't think yourself compelled to adopt all the frivolous and foolish notions which fashion dictates to its followers. For those who have been brought up in its atmosphere there may be some excuse for this absurdity. For yourself I shall consider there is none. You, hitherto, have been under no subjection to its

laws, and I hope your nature is too free and independent to become enslaved to them now."

Tom readily acceded to Mr. Maxwell's views on this subject, though it was one on which his thoughts had never hitherto dwelt. It was arranged that from the following day he was to look upon his new friend's house as his home, and Mr. Maxwell lost no time in having his name put down on the list of candidates for education at one of the colleges at Oxford.

During the intervening months he was to be placed with some private tutor, in order that he might prepare himself for an University career. There was a friendly leave taking between him and the Goodmans. Tom promised to write to his landlady to give her his address when he knew it himself, and if she received any letters directed to him, he particularly requested that she would forward them.

CHAPTER XX.

THE REPUTED MISANTHROPIST.

WE must now give a slight sketch of Mr. Maxwell's previous life, and explain how it was that he came to take so unusual an interest in Tom—an interest so far beyond what gratitude required for a service which accident had rendered it imperative on our hero's part to render him.

Mr. Maxwell had commenced life as a banker, and on the death of an elder brother he had inherited the family estate. At an early age he had been struck with the face and form of a young scion of the aristocracy whose beauty was her only portion, and whose chief idea, when establishing herself as Mistress of Arthur Maxwell's house, was still to live among the great, a constant intercourse with them being the one thing on earth that she coveted. Mr. Maxwell's married life with this young servitor to fashion was, in consequence, an unhappy one. He was possessed by nature of warm feelings, keen perceptions, and much justness of observation, and in consequence the selfishness so perceptible in worldly society grated on his nerves. He became misanthropical, devoted himself to business, and while enlarging his fortune he was at the same time narrowing his sympathies.

After fifteen years of married life a son was born, and the unexpected event seemed to put into him a new heart. He had left his wife to go her own way, but he sternly resolved it should not be so with his son. It seemed likely there would have been a good many contests on this point, but death came and silenced all disputes. Lady Clarice's health had been weakened by this unexpected arrival, but not so her taste for pleasure and dissipation. A doctor was called in who told her she must give up gaiety, but this advice so ill-accorded with her tastes that she rebelled against it. The seeds of consumption had been already sown and, encouraged as they were in their growth, they soon carried their victim to her grave. All the widower's affections were now centered on his son, a child of three when his mother died. He had already amassed a large fortune by his close application to business; he was satisfied with what he had got, and so he retired to his quiet country house, where he occupied himself with magisterial duties, literature, and the care of his son. He was an excellent landlord and was recognised by his tenants, as well as by those of his own rank whom he still acknowledged as friends, to be both a just and a kind man. By those, on the contrary, whose heartlessness and insincerity were antagonistic to his own more truthful and far nobler nature, he was looked upon in anything but a favourable light.

Robert was sent to school at a fitting age, and was in every way giving his father satisfaction, when consumption seized on him as it had done on his mother, and at the age of eighteen he was hurried to an untimely grave. The death of the son occurred a year previously to our hero's first unexpected meeting with the father. Mr. Maxwell had been in the town of Camm collecting his rents, which he was in the habit of doing himself. Maplewood was about six miles from Camm and Mr. Maxwell habitually walked there and back. He had often been cautioned against returning home alone with his pockets full of money ; but he laughed at such fears, and with a stout stick in his hand, and a brave heart within, he conceived that there was no occasion for alarm. Mr. Maxwell's most direct way home was along the path that Tom had taken, and it proved most fortunate, in the end, that our hero's troubled frame of mind on that particular evening should have lent such rapidity to his steps.

The ill-usage of the ruffians had, as our readers already know, a most serious effect on Mr. Maxwell, and for months he was laid up. When he went to Aubrey for the purpose of finding out his deliverer, Mr. Date happened, as we have before mentioned, to be away. On inquiring of the servant who else in the village was likely to know anything about Mr. Marchmont, she had directed him to Captain Bamford. The old sailor had by this time forgiven Tom his mother's offences, and so he was quite ready to speak of him in the

highest terms, and to assert (which he did more positively than his own information on the subject quite authorized his doing) that our hero was a gentleman by birth as well as in feeling. He could not, however, give his visitor the young man's address, for the Captain was no friend to letter-writing, and he had, in consequence, never needed or asked for it himself. Mr. Maxwell was therefore obliged to write to Mr. Date for information on this point. His first interview with Tom had prepossessed him in his favour. Captain Bamford's assertion, and a certain resemblance that existed between our hero and the Marchmont family, had enabled him to guess at his parentage ; he felt for his singularly friendless position, and now he had all the disposition to act towards him as a father.

Had Mr. Maxwell followed the promptings of his own heart he would have been most liberal in his allowance to Tom, whose capacity for spending might, it is probable, have largely developed itself under circumstances favourable to its growth. However, the old man's judgment had long got the mastery over his feelings, bitter experience having taught him to control the latter. He arranged, therefore, to give Tom just what he thought would be sufficient for a gentleman and no more.

“ My house,” he said, “ will be your home as long as your education is going on ; when it is finished and you have the means of supporting yourself, we may enter into some fresh

arrangement." Tom commenced his College life with a strong conviction that he ought not in any way to presume on the advantages which Mr. Maxwell's generosity had procured him. He went to College to work, and he did so with diligence, and having superior abilities to help on his industry, he was soon given to understand that he might make himself remarkable if he thought fit.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MARCHMONT'S OF GRANBY HALL.

GRANBY HALL was situated some twelve miles from Maplewood, and the town of Camm lay between the two places. Beyond this town Mr. Maxwell seldom went in search of associates. In Lady Clarice's life-time the Granby Hall and the Maplewood carriages were continually passing to and fro, and dear Lady Marchmont and sweet Lady Clarice considered themselves to be the most devoted of friends. On the death of the latter her loss was spoken of by her numerous circle of acquaintances as something quite irreparable. However, it had been got over more quickly than could have been anticipated by any simple, honest soul who, imagining words to be invariably the expression of feeling, had chanced to come within hearing of the general lamentation. Society dressed and flirted, and amused itself as usual, even though she whom it had pronounced to be one of its chief ornaments was no more. However, up to the present time there was often heard an expression of regret that one of the best houses in the neighbourhood should have become to all good purposes useless since the death, some sixteen years previously, of its charming mistress. Lady Marchmont still lived for

the world from which her friend and neighbour, Lady Clarice had so long passed away. She had, three years previously ; become a widow, and it had at that time been arranged that she and her daughters should, for a time at all events, still make Granby Hall their home.

Her Ladyship was the daughter of a rich banker, and her fortune had been the means of preventing the dismemberment of the family estate. With its assistance that state was still kept up at Granby Hall for which the place had been hitherto remarkable. However, Lady Marchmont loved show and, even with a good fortune, this is often found to be an expensive thing to maintain, so that there was still occasionally a dearth of ready money at the Hall. Sir Charles's own income was, for his position, a limited one, while his notions were, like his mother's, grand in the paltry sense of the word. Good horses he deemed one of the necessities of life, and to procure them he condescended to certain questionable transactions in the way of horse-dealing, transactions which to the impartial understanding, might well seem as dishonest as pocket-picking or housebreaking, and even yet more contemptible, seeing they involved a greater amount of lying and were attended with considerably less danger. But then much was, of course, to be tolerated in one to whom society was so greatly indebted ; for was not Sir Charles the generous patron of sport, that one aim in life of the Huntingdonshire Squirearchy ?

Lady Marchmont had three daughters, named Juliana, Georgiana, and Emily. The two elder ones, especially Georgiana, were handsome, showy girls, bearing a strong resemblance to their mother. Emily, the youngest, was really beautiful, while her extreme gracefulness, and a certain charm of manner, promised to render her in time pre-eminently attractive besides. Sir Charles was a handsome man with a good address, but a very poor understanding. His college life had ended some two years previously, and he was now prepared to get as much as he could in the way of enjoyment out of those means which fortune had assigned him, and to revive, if possible, the old records concerning the splendid hounds kept by the Marchmont family. When, at nineteen, Tom was about to commence his Oxford career, his cousin, Sir Charles, was twenty-four, while the ages of his three sisters were twenty-one, eighteen, and fifteen.

It was no longer even a tradition in the Marchmont family that some twenty-five years previously a younger son of a younger son had run away from the family seat, and that he had afterwards so far demeaned himself as to form a low connection. The present generation were, indeed, in utter ignorance of the two events which had so entirely alienated Tom's father from his haughty relatives.

The month of March had arrived, the hunting season was over, and the last of their sporting friends had quitted Granby Hall to seek amusement elsewhere. Sir Charles was

finding it dull, and so were his two elder sisters, though the latter were anticipating the pleasures of a month or two in town.

The deep-toned gong had warned the occupants of the Hall that dinner was on the table. It was usually a very silent affair when partaken of by the family alone, and anything in the shape of a bit of news was caught at by the home-circle with wonderful avidity. The three ladies (Emily was still in the school-room) felt their curiosity to be considerably awakened when, just as they were seating themselves, Sir Charles, who had been the last to make his appearance, observed :

“I have heard a very odd piece of news to-day.”

It seemed the intention of the baronet to give his mother and sisters a lesson in patience, for, having proceeded so far, he checked all inquiries by adding,

“But we’ll talk about it by and-bye.”

The three ladies became all curiosity. There was evidently something of mystery—something requiring secrecy in the news, and so it was no wonder that Sir Charles’s female relatives were impatient to have it out. This natural impatience rendered her Ladyship unusually sharp with the footman, while it caused Juliana and Georgie to think their brother unpardonably deliberate in his way of eating his dinner. At length the repast was ended, the dessert was placed on the table, and the room cleared of all inconvenient

listeners, and now her Ladyship lost no time in asking her son for some particulars concerning this mysterious piece of news.

"You know Maxwell," was the reply, "the old fellow who has been vegetating at Maplewood for so many years."

"Oh ! yes," said Lady Marchmont, "the ill-tempered banker who married that sweet girl, Lady Clarice Mountjoy. I could believe anything strange of him. He isn't going to take a second wife, is he, and then kill her with neglect?"

"No, no, nothing of the sort ; there's no chance for any of you unmarried girls in that quarter," and Sir Charles gave a look at his sisters as he spoke. "They say he's a regular woman-hater. He's not going, I believe, to take another wife, but he has adopted a son ; at least so I'm told. A young man of low birth and without a penny ; but the strange part of it is that the fellow should claim a relationship with us."

"What ?" said Lady Marchmont, startled out of all self-possession ; "does any low-born pauper presume to claim a near relationship with us ?"

It had suddenly flashed across Lady Marchmont's mind that some of her own connections were in a considerably lower sphere than herself, and that it might be inconvenient were the relationship forced upon her notice.

"Oh, don't take alarm, mother," said Sir Charles with much *sang-froid*. "He won't get into this house without our permission, even though he should swear to being your own son. I heard of him to-day from Dod. Dod happens to

have in his office a clerk whose relations live in the same village in which this *protégé* of Maxwell's was brought up, and to whom it seems the young man made himself very disagreeable. There is no doubt about it, so Dod says, that his mother was a woman of very low condition, and on what ground this adventurer now presumes to build a relationship with us he does not at all know."

"On no good one," said Lady Marchmont. "Depend upon it he's some impostor who has fairly taken in that foolish old man. It would be a dreadful thing if Harry Harewood's interests were to be injured through the manœuvres of a rogue."

Harry Harewood was Mr. Maxwell's nearest relation. His mother was a widow, living on a handsome pension, her husband having occupied a good position under Government. This pension would die with her, and Harry's own worldly possessions were but small. He got the pay of a lieutenant in the Grenadiers, and little besides. However, on the death of Mr. Maxwell's son, society decided that the fortune of the former must go to Harry, and the younger generation looked forward with delight to the time when he would step into the shoes of his eccentric old cousin, and, if he pleased, run through the family estate.

Georgiana had been looking as excited as her mother during the previous conversation. Sir Charles, who was always for taking everything easy except a mistake in the hunting field, laughed, however, at their fears.

"If," he said, "Maxwell is such an old fool as to be taken in by an impostor, he won't hurt us that I can see. I shall, though, take the opportunity of most positively denying the connection when I next come in his way."

"Can you tell me the name of this new friend of Mr. Maxwell's?" said Lady Marchmont somewhat nervously.

"Oh, he calls himself by our name. I suppose it is on this circumstance he rests the merits of his case."

Lady Marchmont's courage, which had been failing, returned to her instanter.

"It is utterly false," she exclaimed, "utterly false. It is impossible that he can be a relation of yours. He is clearly an impostor," and her Ladyship's wrath waxed hotter as she grew more positive in her assertions.

In speaking as she did she supposed that she was asserting the truth. She had met the heir of the Marchmonts during a London season, and just at the time of the escapade of the old Sir Charles's nephew. The circumstance had never been alluded to in her presence. In her early married life she had lived much abroad and she had not the most distant suspicion that there were any other Marchmonts save those she knew. Harry Harewood's prospects were very dear to her, inasmuch as he had at a recent hunt ball paid particular attention to her second daughter, and the idea of his being ousted out of his expectations by a low-bred impostor was one she could not tolerate for a moment. No

kind of imposition was ever borne with by her Ladyship, unless it were one allowed of by fashion.

"It is sad," she observed, while peeling her walnuts and sipping her port, "to think what injustice is done to society through the instrumentality of eccentric, self-opinionated old men like Mr. Maxwell. They consider themselves too good for the world, and while thinking so they will, in their fancied wisdom, get hold of some rascal whom they will allow to pillage and take them in to any extent. It would not so much matter if the old fools themselves were the only sufferers, but one is sorry for younger and better men who are injured by their folly."

"It *is* a deuced shame!" said Sir Charles. It had just struck him that it would be rather a bore if the Maplewood property were to be left away from his friend Harry, who was recognised by the whole neighbourhood as a thorough sportsman and a thorough gentleman.

"I am glad you think as I do," said his mother, evidently soothed by her sons strong exclamation; "and it would," she went on, "be a real kindness to poor Harry if you were to put the stupid old man a little on his guard."

"That's easier said than done though," observed Sir Charles. "The old fellow, you know, never comes here, and I have not been at Maplewood since Bob died."

"It really makes one wish poor Robert were alive again," said her Ladyship petulantly, "when one hears of his father

taking up with an unknown stranger in this way. I always thought we might have made something of Robert if the old man would have let us. He had latterly a great look of his mother, and she was an angel if there ever was one!"

Sundry feuds between Mr. Maxwell and his wife in which her Ladyship was involved, had made the latter feel ever since that her own reputation required that she should on every possible occasion exalt the virtues of her deceased friend. Sir Charles had long ago grown weary of this perpetual eulogy.

"Well, mother," he exclaimed, "we don't want a funeral oration just as we are at dessert. Bob was well enough in his way, but not to be compared with Harry. I certainly should not like to see the poor fellow cut out by a rogue."

Chance seemed to favour Sir Charles's intention of opening Mr. Maxwell's eyes, if such a thing were possible. On the following day happening to be with Wilson, one of his tenants,

"Have you sold the horse you were wanting to get rid of?" inquired Sir Charles.

"Yes sir," said the latter. "I parted with him to young squire Thornton, and I'm a'most sorry now as I did so, for I'm tould as the ould squire at Maplewood is wanting a horse, and he'd a been sure to have given a long price for an animal like that there."

This observation of Wilson's afforded Sir Charles con-

siderable satisfaction. He was just now wanting to get rid of a worn out hunter of his own, and there was just a chance of his being able to inveigle Mr. Maxwell into putting into his own pocket the long sum that had been coveted by his tenant. It would, at all events afford an excuse for a visit, even though he should fail in his endeavour, and would give Sir Charles an opportunity besides of denying the pretended relationship between himself and the old man's *protégé*.

Peerless, had in his youth been worthy of his name, and when at eighteen, Sir Charles had possessed himself of this noble steed, his pride in him was excessive. Now, however, for the misdemeanour of growing old, poor Peerless was about to be subjected to any kind of usage which a chance customer might impose upon him, and as long as Sir Charles touched the gold, which the sale of him might fetch, he cared not what this once pampered animal might in future have to undergo. Bent on disposing of him, if possible, to a wealthy purchaser, Sir Charles contrived some business in the neighbourhood which should afford him an additional reason for calling at Maplewood.

In compliance with his wife's last wishes, Mr. Maxwell had tolerated that occasional intercourse, which Lady Marchmont had been so resolved on maintaining with the son of her dear friend, Lady Clarice. Since Robert's death, all civilities on either side had ceased ; no kind inquiries had been made

after the bereaved father, and Mr. Maxwell had since the time of this, his heaviest loss, looked upon the Marchmonts altogether in the light of strangers. He was just preparing, gloves in hand, for his afternoon's walk when Sir Charles was announced. Mr. Maxwell's face could be singularly forbidding on especial occasions, and this seemed to be one of them. Sir Charles had an extremely good opinion of himself, and in consequence he was not easily put out. He had been always taught to look on Mr. Maxwell as in every way inferior to himself, and though the real purposes of his visit was to prove this *protégé* of the old man's to be a liar, and to get for his horse twice as much as it was worth, yet he hoped, in spite of these unfriendly intentions on his part, that the ex-banker would not be otherwise than gratified at seeing him.

"I am told," he said, after having in a free-and-easy manner wished Mr. Maxwell good morning, and made preparations for seating himself—"I am told you are in want of a horse, and as I chanced to be riding in your direction I thought I would just look in and tell you that I have a first-rate animal for sale."

Sir Charles's intention of taking a seat had of necessity been resigned. Mr. Maxwell made him feel that the visit must be a standing one.

"I am wanting a horse," was his reply, "but I think it unlikely that you could suit me with one. I have been

thinking, though, of buying a horse that once belonged to you. That wretched animal now driven by Smith the carrier, always excites my compassion, remembering him as I do, when your father hunted him. It is a pity that sporting men should find themselves obliged to help on their finances out of the sufferings of their once favoured steeds."

Mr. Maxwell's reception of his unexpected visitor was, we will admit, a little uncourteous ; but, then, we must remember that he was, in a particular way, a man of strong—shall we say—prejudices ? that he was every inch as proud as Sir Charles or as her Ladyship herself, though his pride was of a finer texture than theirs, that he had a keen insight into character, and that he guessed at once at the money-making purport of this visit. If these excuses are not sufficient for our friend's somewhat churlish behaviour we can only say we are sorry. Sir Charles felt at once that Mr. Maxwell was not a person to be familiar with save when it pleased himself, and for once in his life his self-possession forsook him.

"I beg your pardon for intruding," he said, "I see I am an unwelcome visitor," and he bowed himself out with a certain uncomfortable feeling on his mind that he was not altogether so great a man as he had supposed himself to be.

"A young coxcomb," said Mr. Maxwell, when his visitor had disappeared ; "does he think to palm off his worn-out hunters upon me !"

CHAPTER XXII.

SUSPICIONS AND JEALOUSIES.

FOR two years and upwards Tom had looked upon Mr. Maxwell's house as his home, and yet during all that time not one person in the neighbourhood had honoured him with his card. Morning visitors were at all seasons scarce at Maplewood, but during the Oxford vacation they were more scarce than at any other time. Though the widower had been living from choice for many years in retirement he had still kept up a sort of acquaintance with most of the surrounding families, and he thought it was desirable that those whom he was acquainted with should be known to his *protégé* also. He was therefore beginning to feel hurt at this neglect, which he had excused at first on the supposition that his young friend might be looked upon merely as a temporary guest, and, therefore, as one towards whom no civility was called for. Mr. Maxwell had, in consequence, been at some little pains to let it be known in what light he regarded Tom, but his labor was in vain, bringing with it no recognition of the young man's claims to attention. The old man felt sure there was a reason for this marked neglect, and he resolved on solving the mystery if he could.

It was the month of December, and Mr. Maxwell was, in a few days, expecting Tom home from College. He therefore invited an old friend of his to come and take a *tête-à-tête* dinner with him the day before Tom's return.

Mr. Martin was an habitual diner-out, and he was always sure to know the general state of feeling among the higher circles in the neighbourhood as well as all the gossip that was circulated therein. The invitation was accepted and, dinner being over, and the two old gentlemen left to themselves, Mr. Maxwell went straight to the business he had in hand.

"I am expecting Tom Marchmont home to-morrow," he observed. "I suppose I shall have him with me for the next month."

Mr. Martin cleared his throat but said nothing.

This silence on the part of one who was ordinarily so fluent rendered Mr. Maxwell all the more determined on enunciating his own opinions.

"He is a very fine fellow, is Tom," he went on; "and ever since I have known him I have looked upon it as a lucky adventure that brought him first under my notice."

Mr. Martin was too well acquainted with his friend's pertinacious adherence to his own views, he was besides too much a man of the world, to think it desirable that he should flatly contradict Mr. Maxwell, so he maintained the same imperturbable silence—a silence that was getting intolerable to the warm-hearted, though occasionally imperious, old man.

"I need hardly tell you," continued the latter, with something of asperity in his tone, "how very strange I think it that not one of my friends, not even those with whom I have been acquainted throughout my life, should have thought it needful to show any kind of attention to a young man who is to me as a son, and who is in every way deserving of notice."

As he spoke Mr. Maxwell directed a reproachful glance towards his guest, and Mr. Martin felt it to be at last necessary that he should reveal something of his long pent-up opinion.

"To be candid with you," he said, "there is a feeling in the neighbourhood against this Mr. Marchmont; whether just or not it is not for me to determine."

"And what feeling can the neighbourhood possibly entertain against one who could not, I am certain, be convicted of one ungentlemanly or unworthy act from the time he first entered it until now?"

Mr. Martin considered for a minute and then commenced a reply.

"His peculiar position ——" he began, but he was at once interrupted. Mr. Maxwell was evidently preparing to get angry.

"His position is, in every way an honourable one," he said with decision. "He is the son of a gentleman, and he first won my notice by an act of gallantry which was the saving of my life. I have since then studied his cha-

racter, and I find him to be in every way deserving of respect."

There was a pause, and a threatening look levelled by Mr. Maxwell at his guest.

"Is it," Mr. Martin at last drily observed, "merely on his own statement that you believe your young friend to be related to the Marchmont family?"

"Decidedly not, sir!" said Mr. Maxwell, now getting red with anger; "but if it had been on his own statement alone I should have been as well assured of it as I am of any fact that is beyond the reach of contradiction."

Mr. Martin again cleared his throat, while Mr. Maxwell waxed hotter in his wrath.

"What, sir, do you mean to insinuate?" he said haughtily. "Do you suppose I wish to introduce to my neighbours a man who is a liar, or that I have been fooled into thinking a rogue an honest man?"

"I cannot form any opinion of the merits of your friend," said Mr. Martin mildly, "and we all know that Mr. Maxwell would not intentionally sanction rougery in any form. Report does not speak favourably of your *protégé*, and I cannot make myself answerable for what it says."

"Can you tell me who is the originator of these reports?" inquired Mr. Maxwell eagerly.

"I cannot;" was the reply, "but be assured of this, that I have been myself in no way the means of circulating them."

Mr. Maxwell felt he had nothing more to say and so, getting over his fit of anger in the best way he could, the rest of the evening was spent amicably enough by the two old gentlemen in discussing local matters and the topics of the day.

Mr. Maxwell's warmth in the defence of his young friend had, it must be owned, a little carried him away. It was simply on his own statement that the old man entertained so firm a belief in Tom's relationship with the family at Granby Hall. He had got, though, in the heat of argument, a confused recollection of what Captain Bamford had asserted with regard to his *protégé*'s birth, and for the moment he had been under the impression that he had that gentleman's authority as well as Tom's, for himself asserting what he did. When, therefore, on the departure of his guest; he thought over all that had been said, he felt he had a little over stated his case ; and, being sensitively honourable, this reflection, as he went to rest, caused his head to lie less easily than usual on his pillow. He thought of asking Tom for more positive proofs of his birth, but his sensitiveness again interfered. It would, he feared, look as if he were himself entertaining suspicions of one whom he knew to be all rectitude and honour, and so he made up his mind to let things be. His own belief in Tom's parentage remained unshaken and, as he was too proud a man to care for or to accept any kind of notice that was given grudgingly, he decided that the society of a number of

fox-hunting squires was not a thing likely to do a man much solid good after all. Still, if Tom should have any fancy for a sport which he had himself occasionally indulged in in his early years, he was quite resolved that the frowns of these country magnates should be powerless as regarded keeping his young friend off the hunting field. On the arrival of the latter on the following day he was received with, perhaps, a more than usually cordial welcome.

As the two were sitting at dinner Mr. Maxwell observed : “ I have been this morning with Grant who has a capital horse for sale, and I have given him a sort of promise that I will purchase the animal for you. He bids fair, so he tells me, to make a first-rate hunter, and I suppose you would, like most other young men, have no objection to an occasional scamper after the hounds.”

“ I feel your kindness very much,” said Tom, “ but I never have hunted, and I feel no inclination for the sport.”

“ How is that ? ” said Mr. Maxwell, looking evidently surprised at this expression of his young friend’s sentiments.

“ I suppose,” said Tom, “ it is a good deal the effect of early bringing up. Had I lived among sportsmen I might probably have been a keen one.”

“ It is true enough ! ” observed Mr. Maxwell. “ Our early life influences our future actions more than many of us would be disposed to admit. If you have no sporting tastes I am not one for wishing you to acquire them, though it is not my

desire to force upon you my own quiet habits. Anyhow I should like you to have the horse in question. You can go and look at him to-morrow, and if the animal pleases you, you must consider him as a present from me."

The purchase was made, and on the very next day Wellington found himself comfortably housed in the Maplewood stables.

Harry Harewood was at home for a month on leave, and he too had cast longing eyes on the splendid animal which now belonged to his fancied rival. It was hardly half-an hour since Tom had left Plumptree Farm, when Harry made his appearance there. He came with the offer of purchasing Wellington at the price named by Mr. Grant, having persuaded his mother into advancing him a little money, and now he made sure that the prize was to be his. When he found that our hero had been beforehand with him his anger was unbounded, while the expressions of his wrath were both loud and vociferous. He quickly made it known throughout the neighbourhood that what was expected to turn out the best horse in all the country round, had come into the possession of that young scoundrel whom his cousin at Maplewood thought fit to patronise. Sir Charles felt almost as indignant as his friend, and it was voted by themselves and others that if Tom appeared on the hunting-field they would at once make him feel that he would be better away. Harry was fairly alarmed as well as indignant, for he began more and

more to fear that what he had got into a habit of looking upon as his birthright might be nefariously snatched from him.

At the next meet there were many eyes eagerly scanning both horses and riders, but neither Wellington nor his master discovered.

"Ah! he plays his cards well," said Harry to Sir Charles, "he knows the old boy is no great favourer of sport, and he's sure to follow his patron's lead. It's a cursed shame, I say ——" here Harry stopped, he found he had no longer a listener to his wrongs. One of the hounds had committed a blunder—Sir Charles would probably have called it an act of flagrant disobedience—and his wrath at poor Whymper's short-comings quite precluded the possibility of his sympathising with his friend. Harry poured, therefore, the remainder of his complaint into the ears of the baronet's second sister, to whom he considered himself as partially engaged.

To Georgiana the troubles of Harry Harewood were a subject of the deepest concern, and most joyfully would she have hit upon some plan of ousting his adversary, and of enabling Harry thereby to resume what in fact he had never had to lose—a place in his eccentric cousin's affections. She entered most heartily into his dislike for Tom, perhaps all the more so from its having been asserted that this interloper claimed some relationship with herself.

"The worst of it is," said Harry, with the air of a seriously injured man, "I can't call on old Maxwell while that fellow is about, for he'll be making it a sort of introduction to himself."

"I wish your old cousin would die suddenly, and without making a will," exclaimed Georgie, "for you can never feel safe from injustice as it is!"

"Ah! people never die when they are wanted to, that's the worst of it," said Harry; "but the real shame is that a low, designing fellow like that should be able to take advantage of an old man's weakness. I should like, if it were possible, to tell the young rascal a piece of my mind, though I hardly know how to set about it. To call at Maplewood would, of course, be quite out of the question."

"I should send an anonymous letter to Mr. Maxwell if I were you, warning him against this chosen friend of his."

"No, no," said Harry, startled at the idea of anything that was under-hand, "that won't do at all. If I bring an accusation against a fellow it must be in my own name and on my own responsibility. I would willingly write to old Maxwell myself, only that I know it would be utterly useless trying to undeceive him, for he's as obstinate as a mule when he chooses to take a thing into his head. However, I'll not let that swindler leave the county again without letting him know what I and others think of him."

"It is not of much use letting *him* know what is thought

of him. If you could only convince the old man that he is being deceived it might be doing some good."

"It is of no use—no use at all!" said Harry emphatically. He was well aware that he had never yet convinced his cousin of any one thing, save that he was himself a blockhead.

Having received from his friend and counsellor only such advice as was unpalatable, Harry resolved on acting on his own impulses. He would, if possible, confront his foe, and tell him plainly his mind, and he quite enjoyed the prospect of seeing our hero shrink into almost nothing on hearing the cutting truths which he intended to announce.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CHALLENGE.

CHANCE favoured Harry more than it often does those who are on the look-out for an accidental meeting with either friend or foe. Mr. Black, the rector of Maplewood, had, on account of his health, been obliged to leave his parish for a time, and a young man of the name of Seymour was doing duty for him during his absence. Being unmarried, fortunelss, and agreeable, he was looked upon as somewhat dangerous, had hitherto had little or no society beyond what Maplewood afforded, and as Tom was in a similar predicament the two young men were much together. Mr. Seymour was a distant relation of the Harewood's, and now Harry was seized with a sudden determination that he would make his acquaintance.

Maplewood was about ten miles from Trappit Lodge, Mrs. Harewood's residence, and Harry commenced his journey on horseback. However, his horse happened to cast a shoe, and so he had to leave it with the village blacksmith. Instead, therefore, of riding, he had to walk up the narrow winding lane which led to the rectory. Mr. Seymour was not at

home, and as Harry was returning whom should he meet in the narrowest part of the lane but the very person he was so anxious to confront.

Harry never lacked presence of mind, whatever else he might be wanting in. Drawing himself up to an astounding height, and assuming as fierce a look as his naturally easy, good-humoured countenance allowed of his doing.

“Sir,” he said, in a stentorian voice, “permit me to tell you that you are a scoundrel and a liar !”

Tom’s first impression was that there must be some mistake.

“A scoundrel and a liar,” Harry reiterated, “and unless you promise me that you will discontinue your shameful practices on my cousin’s credulity, I will take care that he shall hear the whole truth from some other quarter.”

“You call me a scoundrel and a liar. I give you the lie back again,” retorted Tom ; “and I will add that you can be no gentleman yourself to speak to a gentleman in the way you have spoken to me !”

Harry had a slight cane in his hand, and with it he gave Tom a smart blow across the shoulder. The spirit of the lion was now fairly aroused in Tom, and he looked as if he might prove a formidable foe.

He carried, as was his wont, the Quaker’s stick, and Harry’s was a miserable weapon compared with it. Throwing it on the ground he gave his adversary a sounding blow on the

chest with his fist. It was at once returned, and the contest might have been a damaging one for both parties, were it not for a timely interposition.

The curate was in the same lane, returning home from his parish work. A turn in it brought him suddenly upon the combatants, and he rushed immediately between them. Both felt ashamed of the position in which they had been caught, and each was at a loss what to say or how to act. Mr. Seymour broke the embarrassing silence.

“Why, Marchmont!” he exclaimed, “you are the last man I should have expected to find engaged in a fight. Come home with me,” and he took him by the arm as he spoke.

“Stay,” said Tom imperatively; “I have been insulted, and I cannot leave this spot without receiving an apology, or else coming to some other understanding.”

Harry’s heat at the first encounter had sufficiently passed away to allow of his admitting to himself that Tom had done a generous thing in not availing himself of his powerful weapon.

“I believe,” he said, “that I have been too hasty, and that I spoke more plainly than I ought to have done.”

“That will not do, sir,” said Tom haughtily. “You called me a scoundrel and a liar. You must retract those words or else take the consequences.”

Harry was somewhat astonished. Whatever might be this young adventurer’s faults, cowardice could not be reckoned as

one of them. In thus confronting, face to face, his imaginary foe, Harry had a feeling that, personally, he rather liked the fellow, and he was equally willing to shake hands or to fight with him, as the case might be.

"I cannot retract," he said, "what I believe to be true. When I have reason to suppose my words are false I shall be ready to make you all the amends in my power."

"You must make the amends at once, or take the consequences of having insulted a gentleman," and Tom prepared himself for a renewal of the conflict.

"This affair had better be settled by writing," said the curate again interposing, and almost forcing Tom away from his antagonist.

"Very well. You shall hear from me, sir," said Tom.

"That is as you please," replied Harry, as he presented Tom with his card and then passed on, whistling a tune from the last new opera to show his indifference as to what might happen next.

The curate took Tom by the arm, and as they walked together towards the rectory the whole affair was explained to him. Mr. Seymour could only account for this extraordinary behaviour on the part of Mr. Harewood by supposing him to be a madman.

Tom would have felt disposed to come to the same conclusion, only nothing he had ever previously heard of Mr. Maxwell's cousin could give the smallest foundation to the

supposition. He thought it would be an invidious task mentioning what had happened to Mr. Maxwell. Harry was, he knew, the old man's nearest relative, and he felt he was himself the last person who should say anything to prejudice the childless widower against one who might be supposed to stand towards him in the position of an heir. The curate was so convinced that Harry was mad that he did his best to persuade Tom to look upon the offence as coming from one not accountable for his actions, and to think no more about it.

So peaceful a line of conduct did not satisfy Tom. His natural disposition strongly disposed him to fight any man who might presume to insult him—a disposition which, even with the most Christianly principles, it is perhaps difficult to subdue. Not being restrained, therefore, by the counsel of the one man who might have influenced him, he borrowed of the curate pens, ink, and paper, and quickly wrote as follows :—

SIR,

You have insulted me in such a manner that I feel my honour compels me to demand of you satisfaction. You have refused to retract your base imputations. I expect, therefore, to meet you when and where you please.

Yours,

T. MARCHMONT.

Mr. Seymour offered himself as the bearer of this note.

“I am an early riser,” he observed, “and I can easily

manage to be at Trappit Lodge before Mr. Harewood has finished his breakfast. It will be desirable that I should have a personal interview with him, for I really think he must be already sufficiently restored to his senses to wish, himself, for an opportunity of apologising."

Tom gave a sort of assent to the curate's observation, and it was arranged that he should lend Mr. Seymour his horse to help him in the performance of the business he had undertaken.

Now the curate felt that if he could succeed in making peace where there was, at present, such a disposition for war, he should be doing one of the best day's work that he had accomplished since he had been in the parish, and this achievement he was intent on performing. So resolved was he on finding Harry at home that he started long before it was light. The consequence was that neither Harry nor his mother had yet left their own rooms. It was a hard frost, so Harry was glad to make the day as short as possible, while Mrs. Harewood generally took a cup of tea in her own apartment. The page stared at Mr. Seymour as the latter inquired if his master were at home, and he evidently thought his visit very inopportune.

"Mr. Harewood won't be dressed for a good half-hour," was his reply.

"I am come on particular business," said the curate, "and I shall be happy to wait till your master is prepared to see me."

The hall was still in confusion, and the page stammered out some apologies.

"I see I am too early a visitor," said Mr. Seymour. "Give your master this card, and say I will be back again in the course of an hour."

Mr. Seymour walked Wellington quietly along the road, looking occasionally at his watch as he did so to see how the minutes flew. At last he thought he might venture on a second effort at getting in, and this time he was successful. He was shown into a small room, and Harry soon made his appearance.

After the first greeting was over Mr. Seymour thus announced the object of his visit.

"I am come on a most disagreeable errand—one I would gladly have had nothing to do with, but I felt that by undertaking to become the bearer of a challenge I might be adopting the best method for putting a stop to further proceedings."

Harry read Tom's note hurriedly.

"I really don't know what I've got to do but accept it," he said carelessly.

"There is obviously another thing which you *should* do," said Mr. Seymour with earnestness, "and that is to retract and apologise for all you have said."

"How can I retract what I know to be a fact?" said Harry impetuously.

"You cannot, sir, know to be a fact," said Mr. Seymour

sternly, “assertions that are positively false. Mr. Marchmont is recognised as a man of honour by all who know him. How then can you, a perfect stranger to him, dare to assert that he is a liar and a scoundrel ?”

Harry looked a little puzzled ; at last he thought he had hit upon what he was never remarkable for finding—a good reason for his assertions.

“I must tell you, sir,” he said, “in self-justification, that the person you are so much interested in is known in all this neighbourhood to be an impostor, claiming for certain ends of his own, a relationship that does not exist. I have good authority for saying that he bore a bad character before he came here, and it is quite evident that he is now acting a part, and practising on the credulity of a very weak old man in order that he may get from him what he has no right to.”

“It is false, utterly false !” exclaimed the curate, giving way, perhaps, a little more to anger than some would have thought becoming in a man of peace. “Mr. Marchmont is straightforwardness itself. He would be above seeking for additional dignity through any fancied relationship with the great ; and, let me tell you, his own high qualities would be sufficient to ensure him the respect of every good man.”

“You are very positive sir,” said Harry haughtily, “but I am at a loss to know why you should be better acquainted with Mr. Marchmont’s antecedents than myself. My only hesitation in accepting this challenge arises from a feeling

that I may demean myself by fighting on equal terms with one whose birth should have placed him in so far lower a sphere."

"I see, sir," said Mr. Seymour in a tone of annoyance, "it is useless, just now, endeavouring to persuade you of what you will, I hope, some day yourself discover to be the truth. I must, though, tell you that, if there is no other means of preventing further strife, I shall give information of the whole proceedings to Mr. Maxwell, and try how far his influence will go towards making matters smooth."

"Your friend has not then spoken on the subject to my cousin?"

"No, sir, he has not," replied Mr. Seymour. "You may be sure that if he had done so the note I have just given you would never have been sent. Should you accept the challenge it contains, nothing shall hinder me from making Mr. Maxwell acquainted with your intentions."

Harry never liked to be proved in the wrong, so he was willing to attribute his challenger's silence to a dread of further discovery, and this idea fixed him all the more in the notion he had been cherishing, that Tom was in truth an unprincipled adventurer.

"May I be permitted to have an interview with your mother," the curate proceeded, finding he could get nothing satisfactory out of Harry.

"With my mother! Why so? If it is that you want to

intrude this disagreeable subject on her, I must decline giving you the opportunity of doing so."

"Then I must adopt the method I at first proposed of hindering further strife. I regret that I cannot bring you to see how much you have been in the wrong," and the curate made a rapid exit.

His horse was standing at the door, and Mr. Seymour was just passing out and preparing himself to mount when he heard behind him a sound like the rustling of silk. On looking back he saw close behind him a lady whom he guessed at once must be the mistress of the house. She made a curtsey, and Mr. Seymour said, as he bowed in return :

"Have I the honour of addressing Mrs. Harewood?"

"You have," was the reply.

"Then you are just the person I wished to speak to. May I be allowed a few words with you in private?"

"By all means," said Mrs. Harewood, who was full of doleful anticipations, as she knew well her son's faculty for getting into scrapes.

Mr. Seymour followed Mrs. Harewood into the room which she had just quitted, and then, after closing the door, he briefly narrated the object of his visit.

Though Mrs. Harewood was not one bit more disposed than her son to think favourably of Tom, yet the idea of a duel quite terrified her, and she was for making any concessions to avoid such a calamity.

"I will write to the young man myself," she said ; "Harry is so wilful you will never get an apology out of him. Say nothing about it to the old gentleman. Your friend shall have a satisfactory note in the morning. Pray assure him of that. Shall I send it to you ? I think that will be the best plan, and you can give it him quietly. For heaven's sake don't let them fight. Remember that ; and keep Mr. Maxwell, if you can, in ignorance of what has happened."

As soon as the curate was allowed the opportunity he gave the promises required, and left with an idea that his early visit had not been altogether fruitless.

When within a mile of Maplewood he met Tom in the road. The first thing he did was to inform his friend that he had had an interview with Mrs. Harewood, and he painted in glowing colours the state of terror she was in at the thought of having her son engaged in a duel.

"That young Harry," he went on, "is not a bad-hearted fellow, I believe, but he has a very limited allowance of sense, and he has taken up a notion which, I believe, has been set on foot by some one who wishes to injure you."

"I know no one," said Tom, "who would be likely to wish me harm."

"Nor do I," said Mr. Seymour, "though I believe, nevertheless, that such an one exists. There will be a note awaiting you to-morrow at the Rectory. You had better come

over for it ; and now I must wish you good-bye, for I am considerably behind my time."

On the departure of the curate Mrs. Harewood walked two or three times hurriedly up and down the room. She then went into what was called Harry's study, where she found her son, cap in hand, preparing himself for the demolition of his morning's cigar.

" You have had an early visitor," she observed.

" Yes," replied Harry indifferently, for he was not aware of the interview which the curate had had with his mother.

Mrs. Harewood at once perceived this, and she determined on profiting by his ignorance. She knew that she might as well command the east winds not to blow on a thorough March day, as attempt to persuade her son not to do what he had set his mind on doing, so she relinquished the thought of arguing with him, and at once resolved on turning her tactics in another direction. Making, therefore, some trifling observation with regard to visitors she was expecting, Mrs. Harewood retraced her steps and again retired into the seclusion of her own apartment. His mother's words merely conveyed to Harry's mind the suspicion that she wished him to be present to entertain the coming guests, and produced in him a fixed determination that he would do nothing of the sort.

Though she had been so urgent in requesting Mr. Seymour to say nothing to Mr. Maxwell on the subject of her son's

rencontre with his *protégé*, yet Mrs. Harewood thought if he were informed of it by her she might put the affair in what she conceived would be a desirable point of view, and make her letter the righteous means of communicating to her son's relative the feeling of the neighbourhood respecting Tom. She fancied she saw the finger of Providence directing things aright, and now aiding her in her long-indulged wish to undeceive a credulous old man, and to have justice done to her own darling. Mr. Maxwell's male acquaintances could never, she knew, venture on broaching the subject to him, and as it had been long since any lady of the neighbourhood had entered his abode, there had hitherto been no opportunity afforded the fair sex of revealing their generally more openly expressed opinions. She thought she would be culpable in not availing herself of such unexpected but manifest help, and never had she given herself a task which she had entered upon with more earnest zeal.

Though her letter was meant to be private we will, nevertheless, publish it for the benefit of our readers. It was as follows :—

DEAR SIR,

In taking up my pen I regret that the subject on which I am about to write should not be an agreeable one. It was quite accidentally that I heard this morning of the unfortunate dispute which my son has got into with one

in whom you have, during the last two years, taken so warm an interest, and who enjoys so high a place in your esteem. I know it is an invidious task to caution people against those to whom they are attached, and that there is nothing more mortifying than to find one has been deceived. I could wish, therefore, that the reports so current in the neighbourhood were not so well founded as I have reason to suppose they are, and perhaps a close investigation of them on your part might be the best means you could adopt for ascertaining their truth. My son is hot headed, and being all straightforwardness himself, there is nothing that rouses his temper like deceit. Feeling so strongly as he does that it is at present being practised on you by the young man to whom you have so kindly afforded a home, he did not, I fear, refrain, as he should have done, from giving expression to those feelings when, yesterday, he met your *protégé* as he was returning from a call he had been making on our cousin, Mr. Seymour. The latter has, it seems, been the bearer of a challenge from the young man to my son, though I must add that he undertook the disagreeable office rather to avert the contest than to forward it. I fear my son would think it inconsistent with his honour to reject a challenge so persistently offered, and I must trust to your good offices to make things smooth. I am sure that Harry regrets that his dislike in the first instance to the idea of meeting the young man in question, and afterwards his stormy interview with him, should have deprived him of the pleasure which a visit to yourself would otherwise have afforded him. If he knew I was writing he would, I am sure, beg to be most kindly remembered, and

I am,

Most sincerely yours,

CAROLINE HAREWOOD.

As soon as Mrs. Harewood had written the letter she despatched her coachman with it to Maplewood. Mr. Maxwell and Tom were at their luncheon when the note was brought in. Mr. Maxwell turned pale as he read it, and having done so he handed it across the table to Tom, who glanced his eyes rapidly over the paper and then read it a second time more deliberately. He gave it back to Mr. Maxwell without making any remark, and the silence was first broken by the latter.

"What dispute is this you have been getting into with my hot-headed cousin?" he asked very seriously.

There was nothing for it but to give a plain, unvarnished tale of the previous day's adventure.

"I am glad," said Mr. Maxwell, "that there is nothing in the whole affair that can be thought in the least discreditable to yourself. I am sorry Harry has been guilty of so very foolish an act, though I must think that you too would have shown more wisdom had you let the challenge alone. But you are not to fight with him—remember that."

There was no reply.

"Do you hear, sir," said Mr. Maxwell imperatively.
"There is to be no more fighting."

"That being your desire," said Tom, "I have nothing more to say. I hope though you will make your wishes known to Mr. Harewood as well as to me, as I should find a difficulty myself in informing him of them."

"That can be very easily arranged," replied Mr. Maxwell, and there was another long pause.

"May I look at Mrs. Harewood's note again?" said Tom, at last breaking the silence. "It seems to contain some strange reflections upon me; so strange that I think I can hardly let them pass unnoticed."

"They shall not pass unnoticed, trust me for that," replied Mr. Maxwell: "and now I am going to ride over to Camm, and I want you to come with me."

Mr. Maxwell was entertaining an idea that it was hardly safe just now to trust Tom out of his sight. He wanted to have a talk with Mr. Jenkins on the subject of the lying rumours which were evidently afloat with regard to our hero, and while he was closeted with his lawyer he sent his young friend to execute certain commissions for him in the town. Mr. Jenkins did not move in the society in which it seemed these reports were circulated, and he could throw no light on their origin, and now Mr. Maxwell resolved on having a personal interview with his unwonted correspondent, and of getting from her some clue, if possible, to its discovery.

While Mr. Maxwell and Tom were on their way to Camm, Harry was riding along the road leading to Granby Hall. He was anxious to give his friends there a report of his adventure of the previous day, and to ask the Baronet for his help. He told his story in a brief and spirited manner, and wound up his narrative with a frank admission that he found

young Marchmont a better sort of fellow than he had given him credit for being.

" You must have a capacious vision," said Sir Charles, " if you can discover anything good in so thorough-going an impostor."

" Mr. Harewood has, no doubt, a very limited vision as regards the discovery of hypocrisy," said Georgie, " his own faults lying in so very opposite a direction."

" Well," said Harry, " he don't look as if he had much hypocrisy in him, though, of course, he must be an arrant hypocrite to act as he does. Anyhow," he added, addressing Sir Charles, " I must accept the fellow's challenge, and I thought of doing so through you."

" I must decline," said Sir Charles promptly, " being the bearer of any message that can reduce you to the level of a man like that."

Harry began to feel that he had got himself into a mess, and to wish heartily that he had never meddled with Tom at all.

" But I *must* do something," he said, scratching his head from utter bewilderment.

" If you'll leave me to settle matters," said Sir Charles, " I will make very short work of it. I will go to-morrow and demand an interview with this pet lamb of your cousin's. I will then tell him plainly how much he mistakes his position in supposing that any gentleman would condescend to place himself so much on his level as to accept a challenge from him."

"Now *do* take Charley's advice," said Georgie, assuming her most winning tone and manner as she spoke. "You may be quite sure it is the right thing to do."

Though Mrs. Harewood's endeavours at guiding her son had invariably proved fruitless, yet Georgiana Marchmont had a certain way with her which generally led Harry into adopting her views, and he did so on the present occasion, though with a little modification.

"It will never do," he said to Sir Charles, "to take that message to young Marchmont himself. He is too ready with his fists, and it will only be getting you into hot water as well as myself. I told Seymour I would send the fellow an answer through him, and your best plan will be to go there."

The frosty state of the weather rendered it easy to Sir Charles to oblige his friend without making any self-sacrifice, and it afforded him an object for a ride on the following morning.

Though the message to be delivered to Mr. Seymour was supposed to be Harry's, yet it expressed altogether the Granby Hall state of feeling, and the arrogant tone in which it was given led the curate to the conclusion that of the two cousins, Tom had a good deal the best claim to gentle breeding. He made up his mind that his friend should hear nothing of this interview, and he hoped that the recollection of the whole affair would die away.

It is probable that Sir Charles would have had an

encounter with his cousin at Maplewood Rectory, were it not that Mr. Maxwell again found that he required Tom's services.

"I shall be riding over to Trappit Lodge in an hour or so," he observed, breakfast being over. "I want you to go to Simpson's about those fences, and as our road will lie for some distance in the same direction, we may as well start together."

Mr. Maxwell's wishes were sure to be Tom's whenever it was a question of any service which the latter could do the former. There were two roads from Granby Hall and Trappit Lodge to Maplewood, and by taking the lower one Mr. Maxwell and Tom chanced to avoid a meeting with the Baronet. Arrived at the latter place Mr. Maxwell inquired anxiously if Mrs. Harewood and Harry were at home. They were, and in about five minutes after Mr. Maxwell was ushered into the drawing-room, the former made her appearance. She felt rather nervous as she welcomed her long-lost-sight-of acquaintance with her accustomed courtesy, while even the *sans souciant* Harry coloured a little as he gave the old gentleman a cordial shake of the hand.

"My visit is on business," said Mr. Maxwell, as he seated himself in the chair that Harry had placed for him, "and we had better come to it at once. I have told Tom there must be no fighting, and now I say the same thing to you. I am

likewise going to demand of you what I have no hesitation in saying your own good feeling ought to induce you to give at once—an ample apology for a most uncalled-for insult. And now, madam," he said, turning to Mrs. Harewood as he spoke, "a word with you. You have informed me in writing of the strong suspicions that you say are afloat concerning a young man of whom you can know nothing, and with whose antecedents and personal character I have made myself perfectly acquainted. I cannot imagine that the injurious hints which you throw out can be merely the concoction of your own brain, or that you are not yourself thoroughly convinced of the reasonableness of your suspicions. You have, no doubt, heard enough from others to satisfy you of their truth, and now I demand of you your authority for these suspicions."

Mrs. Harewood looked ready to faint. She had taken a bolder step than she was ready to stand to. The Marchmonts had been her authority, but how the information imparted to her had ever been originally got hold of by them she had never been at the trouble to inquire, she was fearful of incurring their anger, if by giving up their names any unpleasant scenes should arise between them and a man so very determined in his wrath as was Mr. Maxwell. Mrs Harewood, though wearing generally so bold a front, now seemed to be struck dumb. She stammered and hesitated, and at last said, in reply to Mr. Maxwell's inquiry,

"It is the *on dit* of the whole neighbourhood, but whence it originated I cannot say. I mentioned it principally to put you on your guard. If I have offended you by speaking so frankly I am sorry."

"Pshaw! call it malice, ill-nature, or by any bad name you please, but don't offend my ears by styling it frankness—the attempt to injure another by such ill-substantiated assertions. You must remember that there is such a thing as a law of libel, and that you have been rendering yourself subject to it."

These words took Mrs. Harewood's breath away, while they a little staggered her son who had, till now, been ignorant of the correspondence which his mother had commenced with his cousin.

"I am not going to prosecute you madam," Mr. Maxwell went on, encouraging her while he spoke with somewhat of a grim smile as he noticed the alarm into which his words had thrown her. "Take warning though, from what I have said, and be a little more cautious how you write and speak of others for the future."

"Have you no message for me to take to Mr. Marchmont?" he went on, turning to Harry after having bowed an adieu to his mother.

"None, sir," said Harry stiffly. The tone of authority which his cousin had assumed towards them both did not tally with his notions concerning the dignity of the Harewoods.

"Well, bear in mind," said Mr. Maxwell sternly, "that it is my desire and not my young friend's, that the insult you have put upon him should remain unavenged. Remember, too, that there is for the future no admission at Maplewood for one who, having presumed to affront a better man than himself, now refuses to make that reparation which the commonest courtesy demands."

Saying this Mr. Maxwell stalked out of the room, and shut the door behind him with a slam.

As he disappeared Mrs. Harewood sunk into an easy chair quite overpowered. The finger of Providence now seemed to be declaring itself in favour of Tom, and so, in the proud woman's estimation, it was Providence no longer, but some unlucky chance, probably some contrivance of the Evil One that was at work to the detriment of her son's prospects.

"Oh, Harry!" she at last exclaimed, "if you had but a little of the wisdom of the serpent to defeat with it the practices of a hypocrite, instead of helping them on with your rashness —— "

"And if you, mother," retorted Harry, "had but a little of the harmlessness of the dove, to hinder you from bringing us all into hot water by your interference —— " and Harry swung himself out of the room, and betook himself to his own apartment and to his cigar.

"I have had a most unsatisfactory visit to Trappit Lodge," said Mr. Maxwell to Tom, on his return home. It is quite

clear to me that Mrs. Harewood is making the most of some gossiping reports, probably from an idea that you may be standing in the light of her son. As to Harry, he is so great a fool that I consider his words not worth being regarded by a man of sense, and therefore I must beg you to look on them in the same light as if they were the effusions of a madman."

Tom felt less willing than usual to adopt the advice of his old friend ; however, he would not fight against them, so he said nothing.

Harry ordered his horse on Mr. Maxwell's departure and was again off to Granby Hall to give his friends there the details of the visit. While on the way he observed symptoms of a thaw—symptoms which restored him to his accustomed good humour, and gave him spirits to talk of the stormy interview he had with his cousin as if it were merely a pleasant joke.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CATASTROPHE.

THE joy occasioned by this appearance of a thaw was very general. For three days the hunting gentlemen had had nothing to do, and they were all eager, without further loss of time, for a good chase after poor Reynard, who had been allowed during the summer months to do any amount of destruction in the neighbouring poultry yards, in order that the rich and the idle might have the pleasure of hunting him now. Much ill-will had the unlucky animal gained in consequence, though if the blame had been rightly awarded it would have been put on other shoulders than on his.

Sir Charles had, like his cousin, recently come into the possession of a fine horse. Highflyer had belonged to an acquaintance of his who had been obliged to fly the land, and Sir Charles had got him a bargain. The animal had come from a distance and his new master was all eagerness to show him off to his sporting acquaintances.

It was a beautiful hunting morning. There was a perfect

chorus of voices both from men and hounds. Boisterous was the recognition between friends and acquaintances, and all were in the highest good humour at the prospect of a capital day's sport. The fox was soon found, and Reynard, with his brilliantly brown coat and bushy tail, was seen bounding along over hill and dale, appearing as he went to none but amateurs as if he enjoyed the sport. The horses did no doubt—those among them at least which were owned by the rich, but alas ! for the sufferings entailed by a hard day's sport on the poor, over-worked, hired hack ; entailed on him too by that worst kind of "snob"—the man whose contemptible ambition to imitate his "better" makes callous to the misery he may occasion while indulging in so paltry, so pitiful an aim.

Sir Charles, mounted on his splendid black horse, was foremost in the chase. Highflyer had latterly had a scarcity of work and a superfluity of food, and he soon got so excited that there was no restraining him. With an inflated nostril and a fiery eye he looked as if he scorned all further control from a creature so far less powerful than himself. Onward and onward he rushed, regardless of both bit and curb, until at last he brought himself and his master in front of a rough wall. The efforts of the latter to keep him back were all in vain. Sir Charles had, in fact, lost all power over his high-blooded steed. The wall itself might have been cleared without difficulty, and Highflyer, not knowing the country so

intimately as did Sir Charles, resolved on trying the experiment. On the other side of this rough wall there was a deep quarry, and into it horse and rider were precipitated. They were both killed on the spot and the suddenness and the awfulness of the catastrophe were sufficient to blanch the rudest cheek. There was no more hunting for that day. Reynard was allowed to creep slowly and cautiously back to his own quiet retreat and to live there for a time in happy ignorance of his impending doom. All unconscious of the agonising fate that was yet in store for him, the poor fellow brushed and cleaned himself up, preparatory to recruiting his exhausted nature with some peaceful repose.

As the hunters rode homeward there was much regret expressed at the abrupt termination of so capital a run, while the unlucky chance which had deprived the neighbourhood of one of its most valuable members, was strongly animadverted on.

On the following morning there was a long paragraph in the *Barking Gazette* in reference to the event, which we will transcribe.

“WE have the melancholy duty of recording the saddest “catastrophe that has occurred since the hunting season com-“menced. Sir Charles Marchmont, well known in the “neighbourhood for his high social position and genial qual-“ties, was yesterday precipitated into the Stonewall Quarry, “his horse, a very spirited animal, having become unman-“ageable. Instantaneous death was the consequence. It

" is hardly necessary to state that Sir Charles was the patriotic supporter of that truly British sport to which it is admitted that the nation is indebted for its manliness of character." [An assertion by the way, which if it held good, would deprive nine-tenths of the nation of any manliness at all.] "Sir Charles has left a mother and three sisters to mourn over his untimely fate. The property is strictly entailed on heirs male, and a cousin of the late Baronet's, now a London merchant, will, it is supposed, come into immediate possession."

Mr. Maxwell was always interested in local matters, and his habit on a Saturday morning was to read his paper, sip his tea and eat his toast by turns. He was thus engaged when this paragraph caught his attention.

"God bless me!" was his first exclamation.

"What is it?" inquired Tom in a tone of alarm.

"Something that very nearly concerns yourself," said Mr. Maxwell, recovering from his first shock, and handing the paper to his young friend while he pointed with his finger to the paragraph. Tom read it in silence. There was a flush on his cheek as he handed the paper back to the widower.

"It was a sudden launch into eternity that!" he observed feelingly.

"It was," said Mr. Maxwell, "and it is to be hoped they broke the news quietly to the mother and sisters. I shall be sending John to-day in the direction of Granby Hall, and I must get him to find out more about it."

Mr. Maxwell read the paragraph again, and noted the positive assertion it contained with regard to the London merchant.

"These newspapers are very apt to assert things they know nothing about," he observed. "Jem Marchmont has no more right to that property than I have as long as you are living."

A strange expression passed over Tom's countenance.

"Your grandfather, Reginald," Mr. Maxwell went on, "was the elder brother. Jem was the son of Arthur. I knew them all well in former times. You are the rightful heir, and your claims I am prepared to maintain."

"But my mother has told me that my father had two elder brothers."

"True; he had, but they both died—one of yellow fever in the West Indies, and one of consumption at home."

"Then it seems clear enough that I am the heir, if I can only substantiate my claims."

"Yes, undoubtedly," said Mr. Maxwell, "and we must set about proving them. Have you, do you suppose, any document, showing who your father was?"

"I am afraid not," said Tom. "I cannot remember having ever seen any, but I will look over all the papers that I have."

"Bring them down here," said Mr. Maxwell. "It will save time if we look over them together."

Tom went to his room, and quickly returned with a small desk of simple workmanship. It had been his mother's. The two anxiously looked over the letters it contained. They were chiefly from his father, abounding in expressions of affection, but not one of them making the slightest allusion to the relationship in question. There were two or three kind letters from Mrs. Brown, and another from Miss Birch with stringent stipulations in the event of Nancy's becoming her tenant. There was one also from Mrs. Morgan, written after the news of that fatal shipwreck had reached England. Her letter was kindly worded, and it expressed regret at her own and her husband's inability to help Nancy. She mentioned that they had found the book-selling business a very losing concern, and that they were just on the point of giving it up and of returning again to service. She hoped that little Tom was growing into a nice boy, and that she could have no better wish for him than that he should resemble his father."

"Who is this Mrs. Morgan?" inquired Mr. Maxwell.
"She evidently knew your father."

"I know nothing about her," said Tom.

"Well, I recommended you to keep that letter, not that I imagine you will require it. You know, I suppose, where your mother was married?"

"Yes," said Tom, "she was married at Waltham, where I was born."

"We will go over there on Monday or Tuesday," observed Mr. Maxwell, "and I have no doubt that a search into the Parish Register will give us all the information we shall require." [It would certainly have done so had the marriage taken place a few months later] "I think," Mr. Maxwell went on, "it will be only fair to let James Marchmont know what we are about. I will write and tell him who you are, and how it is that you are by rights the late Sir Charles's heir. James Marchmont was always looked upon as an honest man, and I feel convinced that he will recognise your claims if he sees there is justice in them."

Mr. Maxwell wrote a letter to the London merchant to be ready for the Monday's post, and on that same day he and Tom started for Waltham. The first thing they did was to call on Mr. Dean, the clergyman, who did his best to assist them. We already know that the Parish Register could tell them nothing, and the mortification of Tom and his friend at so utter a failure in this trusted quarter was excessive. Mr. Dean conducted them from the church to the houses of some of the oldest inhabitants. By this means they discovered where Molly Cox and her daughter had once lived. Mrs. Jay still occupied the next cottage, and she remembered her former neighbours perfectly. She expended a good many raptures on Tom's wonderful growth during the years that had passed since she had last seen him. She was, too, quite equal to recording anecdotes of his childhood, and she could

descant eloquently on the virtues of his mother and grandmother; but when it came to giving information on the subject whereon it was so much needed, the good woman found she had not much to say. She was, however, able to tell them that Mr. Morgan was butler, and Mrs. Morgan housekeeper in the same family where Tom's grandmother had served for so many years.

"I can remember well," she said, "your mother going to visit Mrs. Morgan for the benefit of the sea-air, and your father, a sailor and a well-looking man—very like yourself, sir—following her back here."

Mr. Maxwell thought he had some recollection of a butler at Granby Hall bearing the name of Morgan.

"Once get hold of those people," he observed to Tom as he left the cottage, "and we may find strong evidence in favour of your claims."

It was not till very late that night that they got back to Maplewood. On the following morning Tom wrote a letter addressed to the present occupants of No ———, High-street, Plymouth. His letter contained a request for information respecting a bookseller and his wife who had occupied that house some fifteen or sixteen years previously. He added, by Mr. Maxwell's desire, that any one giving the information required should be handsomely rewarded. Not satisfied with this Mr. Maxwell, who felt that his own honour as well as Tom's was concerned in proving the re-

lationship of the latter with the Granby family, sent advertisements to two or three of the London papers, and to the country papers besides, offering a handsome reward to any one who could give him information as to where the couple he was in search of were to be found.

Thursday's post arrived, but with it no letter to either of the occupants of Maplewood.

"I almost wonder," observed Mr. Maxwell, with an ill-assumed tone of indifference, "that I have received no acknowledgment of my letter to James Marchmont."

The old man saw that anxiety was already telling upon Tom, and so he would have had his young friend suppose that he considered it himself a matter of no very great importance whether the claims he had so eagerly put forward were recognised or not.

At the time Mr. Maxwell was making the observation mentioned above, the object of it was, with his son, in a chaise and pair, hastening towards the house of mourning. James Marchmont had been, hitherto, unacquainted with his cousins, but he felt that his presence at the funeral was a necessary mark of respect for the memory of the young man to whose place and title he had so unexpectedly succeeded. Having been unwilling to make his absence from London longer than for one day, he had started at a very early hour that same morning, and, as he and his son drove up to the house, they found the funeral procession already waiting. They were at once

placed in the carriage allotted to them, that which was to be occupied by the chief mourners, and the funeral procession moved on. Slowly it passed onwards through the stately avenue whose venerable oaks had looked down on many such a scene as this, as the representatives of the Marchmonts silently, one by one, had been borne from their earthly possessions to the grave. The dismal looking hearse with its tall plumes waving in the winter's wind ; the four majestic black horses, whose fiery natures were now though with difficulty subdued into harmony with the scene ; the numerous band of hired mourners ; the long line of carriages and horsemen which fell in with the procession as it passed on into the road—altogether the scene was a striking one. But what mattered it—the solemn splendour of the funeral pageant to those mangled remains which were thus unconsciously being honoured ? A moment more of life, a little time to breathe one high and holy thought, to do one generous unselfish act, to catch one spark from the divine essence, one feeling that might bring it into fellowship with God—this to the departed spirit was the one thing wanting—a want which no amount of homage done to its earthly and now decaying tabernacle could in any way supply.

The mother and sisters of the late baronet remained at home during the performance of the last offices for the dead. The intelligence of that fearful catastrophe which had so suddenly deprived her of her son had, at the time, been a

considerable shock to Lady Marchmont's nerves. However, the tenderer feelings had with her never been cultivated, and so, when the first burst of grief was over, it was the fact that the place and title had gone to a stranger which gave a poignancy to her sorrow. She had arranged that the funeral should be on such a scale of magnificence, as should mark the position of the deceased, and she had been enabled to take a certain amount of interest in the invitations which this arrangement had involved. As her son's successor had been hitherto unknown to her she naturally wished that a personal interview with him should be postponed for a little. Sir James readily fell in with her views, and, the last ceremony being over, instead of returning to the Hall amongst a large company of strangers, he had decided that his hired conveyance should again meet him at the Church, and in it he and his son drove at once to Mr. Dod's office in Barking. He had a long interview with that gentleman, and before he left the office he indited a letter to his old acquaintance, Mr. Maxwell, which was as much the expression of the lawyer's sentiments as of his own.

Friday's post brought this letter to Maplewood, and one likewise for Tom. The latter showed an unusual eagerness to become acquainted with the contents of his, for it bore the Plymouth post-mark. They were unsatisfactory. Mr. Owen, the present occupier of No. —, High-street, had only been residing there during the last three years, and he had been a

stranger to the place previously. He excused himself for not having replied at once to Mr. Marchmont's note, but the delay had been occasioned by his anxiety to procure the information needed. However, no one he had inquired of had been able to give him any assistance, though some few of the neighbours remembered the Morgans perfectly. They recollecte^d, too, having been told by them that they were going again into service, but if they had ever heard who with, the name had quite slipped their memory. There was bitter disappointment in the young man's heart, a disappointment that strongly betrayed itself in his features as, folding the letter, he placed it in silence on the table, and then watched the countenance of his friend. The large black seal and the mourning paper left no doubt in Tom's mind as to who was Mr. Maxwell's correspondent. The contents of the letter were evidently painful to the old man. We will give them for the benefit of our readers. They were as follows :—

DEAR SIR,

I was, I confess, not a little surprised at the contents of your letter. I felt, however, that it would not be desirable to reply to it until I had made further inquiries respecting the very singular statement it contained. I have, sir, now reason to believe there is not a shadow of truth in that statement. Don't imagine that I wish to implicate you in what, to all appearance, is so barefaced a falsehood. That this young fellow has completely deceived you I have not a doubt, though I must, at the same time, express my regret that a man of your sense and discernment should have listened so readily to a tale for the truth of which there is not, as I am

credibly informed, the smallest evidence. I beg, therefore, that you will accept the assurance of my continued esteem, and that you will believe me to be faithfully yours,

JAMES MARCHMONT

Mr. Maxwell did his best to command his features as Tom inquired of him whether the mourning letter was the one they had been expecting.

"It is," said the former, as he hastily put it into his waistcoat pocket. "Of course, James Marchmont is not disposed to admit your claims."

"Have you any objection to my seeing this letter?"

"Merely this," was the reply. "If you read it, it may cause you some annoyance, without doing you the slightest good."

"I should wish to see it then," said Tom, "as it is on a subject that so nearly concerns me."

It was unwillingly that Mr. Maxwell drew the offending epistle from its place of custody, and put it into the hand that was extended to receive it.

Tom rapidly made himself acquainted with its contents; then with a flushed face he observed:—

"I am inclined to start at once for Aubrey. I *might* hear something there, and I have it much at heart that I should be able to find some proof of what I assert."

"And so have I, Tom; and so I would have you go by all means, and I wish you a successful journey. It is a

longish ride for one day though. Aubrey must be at least thirty miles from this, so I think you had better put up your horse at Brockton, and hire something there to take you on. You will then have got over the longest half of your journey, and your horse will be fresh to bring you back.

CHAPTER XXV.

TOM'S VISIT TO AUBREY.

OUR hero was soon off, and as he approached the village that had witnessed his growth from childhood to manhood recollections of the past floated vividly across his mind. As he passed Rosebank on his way to the Rectory, he became indeed so buried in old recollections that he had well-nigh forgotten the purport of his journey. They were all gone—those who throughout his boyish days had formed so large a portion of his little world. Some among them were dead; others he knew not where. Why had Lizzie cast him off? He had written to the Goodmans not many weeks after he had left Plymouth and had begged them to remember their promise of forwarding any letters that might be sent there to his address. He had received no reply, and again he had written; but still no answer came. Had Lizzie forgotten him? He could hardly think it, but he did imagine that Lizzie's friends might have decided that all further intercourse between them should be broken off. Lizzie might now be happily married. He should, he thought, take less interest in her if he knew this for a certainty. He wondered if Mr.

Date or the Captain would be able to tell him anything about her. The thought of the Rector reminded him of the Rectory, and now he suddenly discovered he was opposite the garden gate. It was with some little nervousness that he inquired if Mr. and Mrs. Date were at home. Neither he nor his mother had been especially favoured by the worthy couple in former years, and now that he was come especially to try and prove what they had always tacitly denied to him —his claims to gentle birth—he felt that the purport of his visit might very much hinder it from being a pleasant one.

Mr. Date was at home, and the natural kindness of his nature induced him to give a friendly welcome to one whom he had known from infancy. Mrs. Date had just gone out, so our hero's first interview with the Rector was alone. He was fully occupied at first in answering the many questions put to him respecting his present way of life. Having thoroughly satisfied himself that Tom was living respectably, Mr. Date began a little to complain of his former parishioner's negligence in never before having made an effort to come among them, or even to inquire by writing after any of his old friends.

"I have once or twice heard from Saunders," replied Tom, "and he has been very particular in mentioning you all when he has written."

"Has he!" said Mr. Date stiffly. "I have not much acquaintance with that gentleman."

Tom was a little startled at the abruptness of Mr. Date's

manner when the name of Saunders was mentioned ; for, not being well up in Aubrey politics, he was ignorant of the newspaper warfare that had recently been going on between the two M.A.s concerning the use of the surplice. Mr. Saunders had appeared in the pulpit on one occasion in that vestment, when asked to preach by Mr. Date's great antagonist, Mr. Canonby. Mr. Date had thereupon written a letter to the *Barking Express*, entitled "Popish Rags," to which Mr. Saunders had sent a copious reply, headed, "No Religion without authority." The schoolmaster had brought his learning into the strife, and shown how essential were the writings of the fathers to the preservation of the true faith, and how plainly it could be proved by them that for the order of priesthood no garment was so correct as the surplice. Mr. Date and Mr. Saunders were both quiet, kindly disposed men in the ordinary affairs of life, but in matters of creed all meekness and forbearance were at once thrown aside. They now therefore gave one another a stiff bow of semi-recognition if ever they chanced to meet, and seldom was the one alluded to by the other except in terms of disparagement.

Tom was, as we have said, quite ignorant of all this ; but perceiving that the name of Saunders did not sound agreeably in the ears of the Rector, and being impatient to get the information he desired, he resolved on at once trying whether some allusion to that name which he owned himself would prove more palatable. Therefore, without further preamble—

"I am very anxious," he said, "to make out clearly the relationship which exists between myself and the Baronet's family whose name I bear. Can you in any way help me?"

"Not in the least!" was the reply, given very drily and most decisively.

"Is there no one here, do you suppose, who could give me any certain information on the subject?"

"I feel certain there is not. If such a relationship did exist you would most probably find something in the registry of your mother's marriage to help you to prove it."

"That tells me nothing," said Tom in a tone of utter despondency.

"Then the only advice I can give you is to think no more on the subject," was Mr. Date's curt reply; "and now come and have some luncheon, for you will be wanting something after your long ride."

Tom quietly followed his host into the little dining-room, but he could not get up much appetite for the food that was pressed upon him. He asked however with some interest whether anything had been heard of the Quaker's grandchildren, and being answered in the negative, he next inquired after his old friend the Captain.

"He is well, I hope," said Mr. Date, "though I have not seen him since last Thursday week, when I had the pleasure of uniting him in the bonds of matrimony with Miss Rebecca Birch, whom you, of course, remember."

A look of astonishment and then a broad smile were given by Tom in reply to this intelligence. The Captain had (shame be upon him for the act) found the Misses Birch fertile subjects for a joke when latterly he had become a visitor at Oak Cottage.

"You are, I see, surprised," remarked Mr. Date, "and so we all were. Miss Birch was well known to be the first object of the Captain's affection. However, she had, perhaps prudently, foresworn matrimony; and so, finding that his suit was hopeless in that quarter, he turned his attentions to the younger sister, and, as the event proves, with great success."

This further intelligence rather added to, instead of diminishing Tom's feeling of astonishment. However, he thought it wise to make no remark beyond an expression of regret that he should be deprived of the opportunity of seeing one who had been so good a friend to him in former years.

Having got as well as he could through his plate of meat Tom declared his intention of taking a stroll through the village, whereupon the Rector immediately proposed accompanying him. The young man's steps first led him to the cottage that had for so many years been occupied by himself and his mother. He had been feeling sad before, and the sight of it rendered him yet more so. He had embarked in an undertaking which was likely to bring him nothing but discredit. Had his mother been spared him he might still have been living in humble, but contented circumstances

at Plymouth, and have been saved that harrowing of the heart which the proud man must naturally feel when he asserts claims on his own behalf that he can in no way prove, and which in Tom's case seemed to give some foundation for the imputations that had been cast upon him.

When his wish to get a sight of his former home had been gratified, and he had walked from thence to the Church—a walk he had so often taken in his mother's company—Mr. Date proposed returning home. It had turned off into a drizzly, uncomfortable afternoon, and the Rector had grown very sensitive to weather.

"I am afraid you will have an uncomfortable ride back," he observed to his young companion. "I wish I could offer you a bed, but we are this evening expecting friends who will be occupying our two spare rooms."

Tom thanked the good man for his kind wishes, observing at the same time that he would, anyhow, have felt compelled to return home; and as he passed the inn where he had put up his horse, and which nearly faced the Rectory, he ordered the ostler to bring the animal round in the course of half-an-hour.

"Say an hour," interposed Mr. Date. "My wife may not yet be returned, and she would be much disappointed at not seeing you."

Tom doubted whether Mrs. Date's disappointment would be very genuine; however, he did not like refusing his assent to the Rector's proposal.

As it happened Mrs. Date had returned from her walk shortly after her husband and his guest had started on theirs. Betsy was on the look-out for her mistress, for whom she felt she had important news.

"There's been a young gentleman on horseback a calling here," was her immediate announcement as she opened the door to Mrs. Date.

"A young gentleman on horseback! and where is he?" exclaimed the latter.

"He's just gone out with master," said the maid.

"Whatever could Robert be thinking of to go out in such a drizzle?" exclaimed Mrs. Date petulantly and speaking apparently to herself, though she enjoyed at the same time the satisfaction in feeling that she had a listener to her complaint. "But it's just like him," she went on; "and now I shall have him laid up with a cold all day to-morrow, and then he's sure not to be fit for anything on Sunday, and we can never look for any help from Saunders now!"—and Mrs. Date gave a deep sigh at the thought of the heavy troubles that were coming upon her.

Mrs. Date was a fidget, and it was not in her power to sit down quietly and await her husband's return. Following the maid into the kitchen she made particular inquiries of her concerning the appearance of this unaccountable guest. Betsy could only asseverate that he looked like a gentleman, that he had blue eyes and lightish hair, and

that he was ‘a’most a head and shoulders taller nor master.’”

The rector’s wife, having got what she could out of her attendant, now wandered like a perturbed spirit from the kitchen to the parlour, where she occupied herself usefully for a minute or two in stirring up the fire. She then stood at the window, which she opened occasionally, enabling herself by this manœuvre to see a yard or two further down the road than she could when it was closed. Tom was not sufficiently altered to hinder Mrs. Date from recognising him at once, as he at last appeared walking up the garden, by the side of her husband, and her feeling was one bordering on anger when she found who it was that had betrayed the latter into so grievous a transgression of the rules of prudence.

Through the instrumentality of Miss Birch, Mrs. Date had, as we know in former times, learnt to look upon the Marchmonts as pushing, striving people, whose ambition it was to occupy a position superior to that which circumstances had assigned them. This unexpected sight of Tom would hardly have recalled, so vividly as it did, this unpleasing impression, had not that the Rector’s imprudence put his wife thoroughly out of humour. With faulty logic, she was now feeling disposed to cast a good deal of the blame upon his companion for the time being. It was therefore with a coldness somewhat repelling that she accosted our hero, a coldness which contrasted forcibly with the warmth she displayed while administering to her lord and master the sound

reproof which she had in store for him. The lecture, though well meant, was received very testily. The two things of which the minister was most intolerant were Popery and his wife's admonitions. Having given this vent to her feelings Mrs. Date's curiosity now led her into asking various questions of Tom, which he answered much to her satisfaction. In dress and appearance he was, she perceived, far superior to those she ordinarily mixed with, and Mrs. Date began to feel rather proud of her visitor. Her expressions of regret at not being able to accommodate him for the night were, in consequence, extreme. However she resolved, at all events, on making him comfortable as long as he remained her guest. She had already ascertained from Betsy that on the young gentleman's first arrival her master had helped him to a plate of cold beef, which he had not been able to get through. Bearing this circumstance in mind Mrs. Date decided that Tom, as well as her husband, might be a fit subject for medical treatment. A scalding glass of home-made elder wine and water was her grand specific against cold and most other ailments, and now she hurried out of the room for the purpose of preparing this health-preserving mixture. She soon returned with two tumblers, full to the brim, of her favourite cordial. This comforting kind of dose was always received by the Rector with a good deal more of equanimity than was accorded to him by his wife's reprimands, and it was with an appearance of great resignation that he accepted

from her one of the well-filled glasses. Tom was not consulted as to whether he would like the other, but it was unceremoniously put into his hand, after he had been placed previously in a seat by the fire opposite to Mrs. Date's better half. As the two sipped in unison the smoking beverage, Mr. Date had a fine opportunity of protesting against the prevailing heresies. Our hero proved a good listener, and not one of the Rector's views or assertions did he aim at disputing.

His guest's quiet demeanour and the tumbler of hot liquid combined, had put Mr. Date into a very happy frame of mind, from which he was unpleasantly aroused by the announcement that Tom's horse was at the door. Mrs. Date had slipped out of the room as soon as the lecture on Popery had commenced, for she knew it already by heart. She re-appeared as Tom was rising to depart, and pressed upon him comforters and other wraps, which he resolutely declined, and by so doing he materially helped to fortify his considerate hostess in her preconceived notion of the general pig-headedness of mankind.

"Well, Tom," said Mr. Date, as he bade him a cordial adieu, "this is but a shabby visit you have paid us. You must come again another time, and give us a little notice previously, in order that we may be able to receive you for a night or two."

Mrs. Date cordially seconded her husband in this wish.

The encouragement of an intimacy between herself and Molly Cox's grandson had ceased to be looked upon by her as an imprudence.

"That is a very intelligent young man!" said Mr. Date to his spouse, as Tom trotted away.

"Well, he may be so," replied the latter; "though, as I heard him speak so little, I am not qualified to give an opinion. However, he knows how to behave himself, and he looks a gentleman; but whatever was it that brought him here?"

"Well," said Mr. Date apologetically, "it was a foolish affair enough that he came on. He's wanting to prove a relationship between himself and the Baronet's family. I believe the fact is that he has got amongst gentlefolks, and he wishes to make himself appear as well born as they."

"And was that all he came over here for?" exclaimed Mrs. Date.

"All that I could make out," was the Rector's reply. "However, I am not sorry he came, as I was glad to renew my acquaintance with him. He seems to me to be a young man of considerable judgment, and I should be very pleased if he would take holy orders. He must come and pay us a longer visit, and then I will have a serious talk with him on the subject."

Tom's reflections as he rode home that cold and rainy January evening were of the saddest. He felt like a dis-

graced man. It seemed to him not improbable that these repeated failures might tempt Mr. Maxwell to doubt his assertions: indeed, he began to wonder whether after all his mother might not herself have been deceived.

The old man was glad when he heard his *protégé's* ring at the outer door at about eight o'clock.

"Well, Tom, what's the news?" he said cheerfully as the young man entered.

"None," said Tom, as he approached the fire beside which his old friend was seated.

There was a look of misery on the poor fellow's countenance and it went to the old man's heart.

"Give me your hand," said the latter; "I am sorry you have had so little success."

These words, and the tone of voice and the action which accompanied them were too much for Tom. He burst into tears. It was a momentary weakness—one by which the strongest among us may at times be overtaken.

"I believe," Mr. Maxwell went on, as he grasped warmly the hand that had been given him, "I believe I have done you an injustice in putting forward your claims too soon. You must forgive me this want of caution; it can after all reflect no real discredit on either of us. Should our advertisements prove a failure you must, I fear, renounce all hope of gaining what is rightly yours. Your position, though, will still be the same as it was before this catastrophe, and though it

would be selfish in me not to wish it were otherwise, yet I must feel that you are more like a son to me as plain Tom Marchmont than you could have been had you, at the death of your cousin, become possessed of his title and estates."

"And I," replied Tom, "would renounce both title and estates even had I been successful in winning them, sooner than I would forfeit your regard. I cannot, though, but feel mortified at having failed so completely in making good my claims. Those slanderous reports which have been circulated to my prejudice I shall never, I fear, have the means of refuting."

"Tut ! tut ! a fiddlestick for reports," observed Mr. Maxwell, with contempt in his tone. "I can afford to laugh at such things myself. You will never be good for much, Tom, in this world if, with a good conscience, you cannot feel proudly indifferent to the gossipping rumours of idle and superficial people. Believe me you won't lose by them one friend that is worth having."

These sharp words from Mr. Maxwell acted like a sort of tonic on Tom's depressed temperament, and the old butler having at this moment brought in a hot and savoury dish, our hero prepared himself for its demolition with something almost amounting to enjoyment.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SIR JAMES'S VISIT TO GRANBY HALL.

IN a week's time after the funeral Lady Marchmont found herself well enough to receive Sir James. She had been anxious to come to some arrangement with him, and on the occasion of this, her first interview with her son's successor, she contrived to have everything settled much to her own satisfaction. She and her daughters were to have the liberty of remaining at Granby Hall for a twelvemonth, which would be allowing them ample time to suit themselves with another residence. There was a house in the neighbourhood which was to be vacant towards the end of the year, and Lady Marchmont looked forward to becoming its future occupant.

Finding Sir James so disposed in every way to be kind and considerate, her Ladyship felt inclined to look upon him in return with a large amount of favour. It was therefore with a most gracious smile that she invited him to take a seat beside her at the tea-table on his making his appearance in the drawing-room after he had been previously occupying himself alone in the library with family papers.

On placing himself in the chair appointed for him, “Do you,” he inquired, “happen to know anything of that young fellow who has been laying claim to the title and property?”

If Lady Marchmont had been told that the house was on fire she could not have looked more startled.

“You don’t really mean to say he has done that!” she exclaimed.

“He has, indeed,” said Sir James sarcastically. “I should mention, though,” he added, “that it was Maxwell who communicated with me on the subject, and as I know him to be an honourable man, I thought that this claim on the part of his young friend might be worth looking into. I had, therefore, an interview with Dod on the subject, and I am not surprised at finding that his opinion of this unknown pretender is anything but favourable.”

It was some time before Lady Marchmont could sufficiently swallow the indignation that was choking her, to allow of her giving utterance to her feelings.

“Upon my word,” she at last exclaimed, “I think a lunatic asylum would be the fitting place for old Maxwell, and I am quite sure no one more richly deserves a seven years’ transportation to Botany Bay than does that young friend and ally of his. The young man seems really insatiable in his ambition. He has, I fear, quite succeeded in cutting out Mr. Maxwell’s nearest relation, but really to push his pretensions here shows an amount of audacity which

I should say was unnatural were I to read of it in a novel."

"Ah! my dear madam," said Sir James, "truth is, you know, often stranger than fiction. I could myself tell you many wonderful stories concerning the credulousness of old men—of men, too, like Maxwell, who pass in the world for being sensible and clear-sighted."

"Well," said Lady Marchmont, "it may be as you say though I will own I could never, myself, discover sense or clear-sightedness either in that old cynic. His discernment did not help him to appreciate his wife, dear Lady Clarice, who was one of the sweetest of creatures! It was a sad thing, her early death, such a loss as she was to the neighbourhood; and I shall always think her days were shortened through the unkindness, I may say the cruelty, of her husband."

"Nay, nay, madam," said Sir James, whose turn it now was to be startled, though not to the same extent as had been her Ladyship, "I cannot allow you to say such hard things of an old acquaintance of mine without defending him. I will not believe that Maxwell could ever have acted with cruelty towards any one, though I will admit that he may be an impracticable man—one who is never content to go quietly with the stream."

"Well," said Lady Marchmont, "if you can point out to me any act of real kindness that he has shown himself capable of

I shall be more willing than I am at present to adopt your views. If you call the harbouring of a thorough-going impostor—one, too, who has made no end of mischief between the old man and his nearest relation—if you call that an act of kindness—why, then, our notions of what kindness means are so very opposite that it would be useless for us to try and come to any agreement on the subject."

"Far be it from me," said Sir James, "to assert anything of the sort. No one can regret more than I do the singular delusion that my old friend seems to be labouring under with regard to that young man. I shall, I fear, myself be a sufferer from it, for I hoped to have renewed my acquaintance with Maxwell. The presence of this *protégé* of his, and the fact of his having persuaded his patron into thinking him the rightful owner of what is now mine would, of course, preclude the possibility of any intimacy."

"Do you think," said Georgie earnestly, "that there is the smallest chance of the old man's eyes being opened? I should fancy he could hardly help, even now, suspecting that he has been made a dupe of."

"Don't *you* think," said Sir James with old-fashioned politeness, as his eyes rested on each fair face in turn, "don't *you* think that if you ladies had exercised that influence which is so well known to be yours, you might have kept my estimable friend from shutting himself up in a kind of hermitage, where, no doubt, he has been pining for something like

human affection, till at last he has got himself into a fit state to be taken in by any one sufficiently dexterous to impose upon him?"

These last words made a considerable impression on the mind of her Ladyship. She thought with Georgie that Mr. Maxwell's faith in his *protégé* must now be, at all events, weakened, and that in that case he would again be yearning for affection. Might it not come to him like a ministering spirit in the form of her handsome and clever daughter, Georgie? The Oxford term would commence in a few days, and then she would have the field all to herself. She had won a sort of mastery over the headstrong Harry—might she not as easily, if she once set herself to work, gain a similar ascendancy over his probably not more headstrong cousin?

While Mr. Maxwell and Tom were being thus discussed, both one and the other were feeling a good deal depressed. In spite of the high tone of philosophy assumed by the former and the ready assent given by the latter to the elevated sentiments of his friend, they neither of them could get rid of a certain impression that the high sense of honour which each possessed had been called into question. We are all human, and must, in some measure, be alive to the pricks and stings so often attendant on untoward circumstances, even though our consciences should be as clear as crystal. Tom had an uncomfortable dislike to the

idea of being met, a feeling which was not diminished by the very particular notice taken of him by her ladyship when on a certain day, our luckless hero accidentally came across her path. It was unfortunate for Tom that this meeting should have occurred in a lane, the narrowness of which obliged him to pass close beside Lady Marchmont's grand looking equipage. It was an open carriage in which she was seated, and her second daughter was by her side. The proud woman's naturally stern, though handsome, features became sterner, and her carriage more haughty, as she raised herself in her seat for the purpose of giving Tom an insulting stare—one that the young man could not fail of noticing. It had the desired effect, for it wounded him to the quick, and it was with an unusual sensation of pleasure that he took leave of Maplewood and of its kind and generous occupant, to return to the routine of college life.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LADY MARCHMONT'S EFFORTS AT A RENEWED INTIMACY ARE
REPULSED.

OUR hero's ridiculous claims to the Marchmont Baronetcy and estates furnished for some days a fertile subject of conversation, and set the whole neighbourhood talking and speculating. It was not long ere Lady Marchmont was made acquainted with this all-prevailing topic, and it was one in which she considered herself to be most justly interested. It was, though, in fact, a good deal more for her daughter's sake than for Harry's that she felt so anxious to shield the latter from all fancied injustice, and to have him openly proclaimed as his cousin's heir. It was on Georgiana's account that her active mind was now at work planning some means of winning for her future son-in-law what society chose to look upon as his due.

Not many weeks had elapsed since the death of Sir Charles e'er her Ladyship again felt herself equal to receiving morning visits, and as Mr. Martin was always scrupulously particular in fulfilling his duty as regarded visits of ceremony he was one of the first to call and inquire after the bereaved mother. He merely sent up his card, not expecting that he

would be admitted ; however, he received in return an invitation to come in. After all proper forms of sorrow had been gone through on either side, her Ladyship asked if there were anything going on in the neighbourhood.

“ Yes,” was the reply, “ there was a large dinner party yesterday at the Youngfellow’s. We had the Finchs, and the Spaldings, and the Burfords there, and your neighbours also, the Harewoods. Harry is a fine, open-hearted, generous fellow, and every one wishes him better fortune than he has got. People are indeed very much wondering whether my good friend, Maxwell, will at last do the right thing by avowedly giving Harry that position with regard to himself to which he seems entitled.”

“ And what is your opinion on the subject ? ” said Lady Marchmont eagerly.

“ Well, upon my word,” was the reply, “ I don’t know what opinion to give. I don’t imagine that that young *protégé* of Maxwell’s will any longer stand in Harry’s way. My old friend must suspect by this time that he has been taken in. We shall not see the young fellow much in this neighbourhood after what has occurred—take my word for that—though Mr. Maxwell is so punctiliously honourable that he would, no doubt, carry out any actual promise he had made to the young man.”

“ And what promise, do you suppose, he has made him ? ” said her Ladyship anxiously.

"None, I should imagine, of any great importance. Probably he has undertaken to educate him and give him a start in life. I should fancy this *protégé* of his may be preparing himself for the Church, and in that case he can easily be settled in a curacy, and Maxwell may consider his duty towards him done."

"I hope your supposition may prove a correct one," said Lady Marchmont. "I do so wish though you could use your influence with my former friend, and get him to mix with us all a little more than he does. I am sure solitude has had a bad effect upon him, otherwise a man of his sense would hardly have opened his house to an entire stranger, to a young man, too, whose character he would have found out to be a bad one, had he been at the slightest pains to inquire."

"Your views on that subject are precisely my own. I have often lamented that a man of his powerful intellect and so much real worth should have so long and so persistently declined to let society at large benefit by his various endowments."

"It would seem," said her Ladyship, assuming a tone of sadness, "as if Mr. Maxwell and I ought just now to have very much of a fellow-feeling towards one another. We have both met with a similar calamity." Here she paused for a minute—it might be that a pang of true motherly sorrow had checked for a time her flow of words. "I often think now," she went on, "of the time when dear Lady Clarice and I

used to talk together over our two boys. I had hoped that as they had each grown into manhood they would have been as near and dear friends as were their mothers."

Mr. Martin's feelings were evidently touched. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes. Though an old bachelor himself he recognised the claim which a mother's grief has on general sympathy.

"I feel sure," he said, "that our friend, Maxwell, is quite one to enter into your trouble."

"Are you likely to see him soon?" inquired her Ladyship.

"I called at Maplewood a couple of days ago, but he was out. However, I am quite intimate enough to call again without waiting for a visit in return, and if you should wish to have any message delivered to him, it would afford me much pleasure to be the bearer of it."

"The fact is," said her Ladyship, "that Sir James was talking a good deal about Mr. Maxwell who, it seems, was formerly a friend of his as well as of ours. He is anxious, I know, to renew his acquaintance with him, and I could not help regretting, when he spoke about it, that all intercourse between ourselves and Mr. Maxwell should have so entirely ceased."

"Am I to understand from what you say that you would be glad of a visit from my friend?"

"I should indeed feel much gratified were Mr. Maxwell to give me an opportunity of welcoming him here. It might

be an inducement to Sir James to pay us another and a longer visit were I to hold out to him the prospect of meeting one for whom he entertains so sincere an esteem."

"I shall be delighted to be the bearer of your message," said Mr. Martin, "and if you should be the means of bringing him out of his chrysalis, I shall be one among the many who will feel that you have done a service to society."

Mr. Martin was a man without any particular occupation and he was always glad to have some business on hand, so the very day after his interview with Lady Marchmont he made another call at Maplewood, and this time he found his friend at home.

Though Mr. Martin had used such polite expressions to her Ladyship when the renewal of a broken-down intimacy was canvassed by her, and though, perhaps, at the time, he had really meant what he said; still, when thinking the matter over afterwards he had begun to entertain serious doubts as to whether Mr. Maxwell would as heartily coincide in her views as he, Mr. Martin, had led her to suppose that he would. He felt, at all events, that it would be necessary to enter on the subject very warily. He first got into a long discussion with his friend about politics, a subject on which they were both of one mind. Then the weather came under review. The scarcity of hay was next commented on, and this led to some commendatory remarks on the good farming

of one of Mr. Maxwell's favourite tenants. The compliment told; and now our diplomatist ventured on making the promised overtures.

"I was at Granby Hall yesterday," he observed.

"Ha!" said Mr. Maxwell, "how was Lady Marchmont? Of course you did not see her."

"I did not *expect* to see her," observed Mr. Martin. "However, on the strength of a long acquaintance she granted me an interview."

"Then I conclude she is as well as—I may say better than might be expected."

"Lady Marchmont," observed Mr. Martin with as much loftiness of manner as if he were descanting on the heroism of a Nelson, "Lady Marchmont is one of those high-soul'd women whose fortitude is never found wanting, let the emergency be what it may. I have, nevertheless, every reason for thinking that she feels her son's death most acutely."

"Why, she would be a monster if she did not," said Mr. Maxwell somewhat gruffly.

"She would, indeed;" said Mr. Martin, "for so sudden, so terrible a shock few mothers have had to sustain."

"I have had your old servant, Lloyd, here this morning," said Mr. Maxwell, by way of making a change in the conversation. "He came to speak about my letting him the Hopwood Farm. With the good recommendation I got from yourself, I agreed to his proposal."

"I have every reason," was the reply, "to think you will find him a good tenant. You did not, I believe, see Sir James when he was in the country?" Mr. Martin then inquired, with resolute perseverance—

"The devil take Sir James," exclaimed Mr. Maxwell impatiently. "Let's hear, no more of him nor of Lady Marchmont either."

Knowing the man, Mr. Martin was not so startled as he might otherwise have been at his friend's choleric reply to a courteously put question, and it decided him on immediate acquiescence in the wish therein contained. To smooth down the old gentleman's wrath he proposed a walk round his farm, and the two friends parted on as good terms as if her Ladyship's sorrows, and Sir James's visit, had formed no part of the conversation.

As Mr. Martin had nothing pleasant to communicate concerning Mr. Maxwell's feelings towards Lady Marchmont, he thought it best to say nothing, and so the latter was left in doubt as to whether her wishes were looked favourably upon or not.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TYRANNY OF A FOOLISH WIFE.

JAMES MARCHMONT had, like his old acquaintance Mr. Maxwell, shown but little wisdom in his choice of a wife, though he had not chosen her out of the higher classes of society. The father of the present Lady Marchmont had been merely the head clerk in a mercantile house of which the new Baronet was partner. There had, however, always been an intimacy between the two. Mr. Dawkins was a man in every way superior to his position. He was an agreeable companion, and James Marchmont was no lover of solitude. He had, in consequence, accepted many an invitation to the clerk's unpretending mansion, and had, in this manner, formed an intimacy with Mr. Dawkins's belongings. These consisted of a wife and a large family of sons and daughters, of whom the elder ones were fast growing into men and women, and just at the time when he was most needing a good income, for the purpose of giving them a start in life, his sight had failed him altogether. He had been compelled in consequence to give up his office, and, with reduced means, the poor clerk's embarrassments were considerably augmented

The kind-hearted merchant felt for the afflicted man in his distress, and he decided on relieving him of one of his daughters. Jessie was at this time a good-looking girl of eighteen, while James Marchmont was a man of thirty-five. It was her father's difficulties and the probable discomforts they would entail on herself which led Jessie far more than any affection that she entertained for her future husband, to accept him as such. The generous merchant soon found out that it was a mistake on his part, when he let pity get the mastery over his better judgment, in so serious an affair as matrimony.

Jessie's own education had been very deficient, and she was in no way calculated to make a good guide and counsellor to her children. Her idea of doing her duty by them was in truth but a limited one. She was anxious to keep them in health, to give them what she considered to be good company manners, and to dress them as smartly as she could. Her ambition in the latter respect went far beyond her means, James Marchmont having till recently been but a poor man. But when was a woman ever known to be daunted in any undertaking she had once set her mind on ? Though money was scarce, Jessie had pliant fingers and a surpassing amount of industry in the furtherance of any object of her own. Morning, noon, and night was she engaged in putting trimmings on her children's garments, which, for all essential purposes, would have been as well without them ; indeed, to

the severe but correct eye of taste these laboriously contrived decorations might probably have appeared nothing better than unsightly appendages. By Jessie, however, they were deemed of the utmost importance, and so absorbed was she in their construction that she could give her mind to little besides. Had her children, therefore, grown up with one right thought or one right feeling they would hardly have had to thank their mother for it. But what cared Jessie for their thoughts or their feelings as long as their frocks and their drawers were extensively trimmed. Jessie's unwearied industry with her thimble had led her into looking upon herself as a kind of martyr. If, therefore, her husband ever ventured to complain of neglect in other matters which he might consider more essential, she would narrate to him in a tone of grievance how constant were her labours, and then wind up by asserting that if he wanted more done he must do it himself. Poor James had at last found out how useless is the attempt to reason with a woman who is altogether unreasonable. Having, too, once begun to despair of mending matters by means of remonstrance, he had given up finding fault and left the industrious mother to sew on in peace, and to her heart's content.

Sir James had, as we have before said, been a poor man until recently, when a fortunate speculation had suddenly rendered him rich. He had himself borne his successes with much composure, but they had completely turned the head of

his wife, and now that he had so unexpectedly come into a title the new Lady Marchmont considered herself a very grand lady indeed. Her thoughts at once soared above embroidery, and her industry was for the future to be employed chiefly in working for herself and her offspring a position in society. This intention was warmly participated in by her son and two daughters, with whose elevation, to do Jessie justice, it must be owned she was more occupied than with her own. Samson had just attained the age of twenty-three, and he, especially, was with his mother all on fire to make the most of their worldly advantages and to obtain, through their instrumentality, an entrance into fashionable life. Sir James would have wished to have lived quietly and unostentatiously still, but his family rebelled against such very confined views, and as an unreasonable wife and three self-willed children are more than a match for most men ; Sir James was beginning to find his own strength fail him under the force of the current that had set in against him.

Lady Marchmont had always been dull in discerning her husband's merits, but it was far otherwise with regard to her son. In him she contrived to find perfections where others would simply have discovered faults. Most serious wrong had she done her first-born by fostering him in his self-esteem. He was, in her estimation, a heaven-born genius, who could do all things well that he attempted. It was this chiefly among Jessie's very limited stock of ideas that she had most

thoroughly instilled into Samson, and he was one whose nature never betrayed him into hiding his fancied lights under a bushel. So inveterate, indeed, was his practice of displaying that superiority which he could make clear to no one save to his mother and himself, that both friends and acquaintances were apt, when out of the doting woman's sight and hearing, to vote this youthful Solomon a bore.

With such high notions as regarded her son's capabilities it was not strange that Lady Marchmont should now cherish brilliant hopes respecting him. Strong indeed, was the belief within her that, when once the opportunity was afforded him of getting among the higher classes, he would be received by the whole band of the *élite* with open arms.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SAMSON'S FIRST ENTRANCE INTO GOOD SOCIETY.

NEARLY two months had elapsed since the death of Sir Charles, and Lady Marchmont was thinking it time she should adopt the advice given her by her daughters and her intimate friends, and again enter a little more into society. They were one and all anxious to see the future inheritor of the Baronetcy, and Juliana had at length prevailed on her mother to fix some definite time for the proposed invitation to their cousin. Great were the rejoicings in Montague-square when it arrived, for now were going to be fulfilled, as Jessie believed, some of her most cherished wishes.

While the new Lady Marchmont was indulging in these hopeful visions concerning her son, there was one among the party still resident at the Hall, who already felt disposed to lend her influence towards realising them. Juliana was getting heartily tired of the subjection she was under in her mother's house, where she never had been a favourite ; and she longed to emancipate herself. She was, in consequence, quite prepared to make the best of her cousin, and if she could succeed in getting him under tutelage, and in giving him some of

those views and notions which the world of fashion deems to be correct, she considered that rather a brilliant destiny might await her. Emily, the mother's best beloved, and the most attractive of her three daughters, was just now at a fashionable finishing school in town, while Georgie was already occupied with a lover.

The first sight of Samson was prepossessing to none of them. His countenance was expressive of little beyond self-complacency, and though this would have been a very pardonable fault in Juliana's eyes, yet his outward appearance carried with it other and more serious defects. He had neither the air of a man of fashion nor the cut of a country gentleman, and this in spite of the long bill he had run up at a West-end tailor's by way of preparing himself for his visit. His demeanour showed a good deal of assurance, but it was of a fussy kind, and the efforts he made at displaying his fancied acquirements, and at informing and enlightening his cousins, were looked upon by the whole party as mere blunders. Juliana was indeed beginning to wonder whether the few friends they had invited to meet Samson on the following day might not pronounce him to be either a coxcomb or an idiot, and she got more and more to fear that both characters might be awarded him.

“Do you hunt?” was one of the first questions she had put to him by way of sounding his capabilities.

Samson was never one to confess an incapacity for any-

thing except the adoption of his father's old-fashioned notions, and certainly that noblest and most aristocratic of all British sports was the last thing to which he would have pleaded ignorance. He had, though, been feeling bitterly his defective education in this respect, but he believed, nevertheless, that with resolution on his part he had ability enough to make a good appearance in the hunting-field as well as in her Ladyship's drawing-room, where the ignorance he so frequently displayed was, of course, unobserved by himself, though by no one besides. Putting, therefore, a bold face on the matter he assured his cousin that there was nothing he liked so much as a good chase after Reynard, and Juliana derived comfort from the assurance.

The few expected friends were assembled, and Miss Marchmont made a point of very particularly introducing her cousin to their friend and neighbour, Harry Harewood. The latter was well up in sporting phrases, as well as in other expressions prevalent in fashionable society, and so he might, she hoped, be of some use to the future Baronet. There was nothing Harry liked better than chumming with some one who would let him have the talk all to himself, and for once Samson proved himself a good listener. There was a reason for his assuming this unwonted character.

Sporting language was at present as unintelligible to him as was that of the Persians or of the Patagonians, and he felt how essential it was that he should seize any opportunity of

acquiring it. It was, besides, in the hunting season the only language in which Harry could manage to converse. Occasionally a question was put by his auditor which to his sporting ears must have sounded strange, but then these queries were indicative of the value attached by his new acquaintance to his superior knowledge, and it was seldom that Harry's observations received such flattering attention as was paid them on the present occasion. His tickled vanity and his good nature together induced him to look so far leniently on Samson's ignorance as to offer him the loan of his own horse when the latter in the course of conversation expressed the earnest desire he entertained to see some sport in the neighbourhood.

"I have got a mare on trial," he observed, "which I am going to ride myself."

This offer was at once accepted and after a little conversation with mamma it was decided that Juliana and Georgie might, without impropriety, join in this last hunt of the season.

Scarcely had Samson mounted the steed that had been allotted him ere the mind of his elder cousin was overwhelmed with doubts and misgivings as to the way in which he would acquit himself in the hunting-field. On their way, however, to the meet they would have to pass Trappit Lodge, where it was expected that Harry would join them, and in a fit of desperation Juliana decided on asking that good-natured

friend if he would give her cousin a hint as to the right management of the fine animal which he was at present so woefully mis-managing. Harry's quick eye and ready tongue saved her the annoyance of making so mortifying a request.

"I say, Marchmont," he said, "that horse of mine has got rather a tender mouth. Don't pull at him quite so hard with the bridle."

Samson's instantaneous compliance with this request spurred Harry on to offer him some further counsel. "Spitfire," he observed, "is a little fresh this morning, and I expect you will find him rather hard to manage. I should advise you therefore not to attempt any leaps but just to go quietly round through the gates. You are sure to find some who will keep you company. By the bye I'll introduce you to Martin if he is out to-day. He's a quiet sort of fellow, but he *must* know something of sport, as he has been at it in a way for the last fifty years, and so you are sure to get lots of information out of him."

Harry's well-intentioned advice had the effect of bitterly mortifying this young aspirant after hunting celebrity, for it compelled him to see, blinded though he was by self-conceit that his genius for sport was not intuitive. He was not, however, one to be easily abashed, and finding there was no possibility of concealing his ignorance, he thought it advisable that he should get his companion to help him out of it by giving him a few further hints. As to following the

old gentleman round by the roads and through the gates, his pride revolted at the idea of such a degradation. Sooner would he have broken his own neck and with it his mother's heart, though to hinder the former catastrophe he did not feel above seeking for information where it was so readily to be found.

"Can you give me an idea," he said, "how to manage your horse so as to get him to take a leap?"

"Oh, there's no fear of his refusing anything," said Harry warmly. He was at once for defending Spitfire's character, which he fancied had been attacked. Then prompted by an unwonted feeling of prudence he added, "it would be an awkward thing though if you should get unseated, or if Spitfire should choose to take you where he had no business to go."

Samson was beginning to feel just a little nervous. He saw clearly for the first time in his life that he had been too confident in his own powers. It was true he had recently become himself possessed of a horse which his father had given him at the request of his mother, though with stringent cautions from her that he was to study steadiness as well as showiness in the purchase. Samson found, however, that riding round the Park on a quiet animal in the dead season of the year, was a very different thing from bounding along the turf on a high mettled steed which had already discovered the incapacity of its rider, and which was

quite ready to run away with him on any fitting opportunity.

They had just arrived at Yatton and the sight of the hounds and horses put Spitfire into such bounding spirits that it was hard work to Samson to keep his seat.

"Hullo, old fellow! how is it you are here on foot?" shouted Harry to a boy of sixteen who was standing a little way apart from the crowd of horsemen, apparently on the look out for him.

"Why that stupid groom of ours let Derby fall yesterday," was the reply, "and so I've got no horse to ride! I'm going back to school to-morrow, and I thought I'd just walk across to wish you good-bye. I've got a note too for you from mamma."

"Is your friend in want of a horse to ride?" said Samson now eagerly addressing Harry, "because if he is I shall be most happy to dismount and let him have yours."

"A capital plan!" exclaimed the other, who, if the truth were known, was a good deal more anxious for the safety of Spitfire's knees than for that of his rider's neck, both being in his estimation in considerable jeopardy.

Samson was not altogether a hero in his own eyes while in the act of dismounting, and in his heart he cursed his destiny which had given him so homely a bringing up.

To Harry his new acquaintance's rapid descent brought wonderful relief, and hardly was Samson out of sight and hearing before he exclaimed to his friend and confidante, Georgie.

"What a queer fellow that cousin of yours is ! Thank Heaven, however, Spitfire is released at last from carrying such a jackass. It would have gone hard with them both, I expect, if Marchmont had not alighted on *terra firma* in good time."

"Oh !" said Juliana in a tone of pique. "Samson will do very well by-and-bye. I expect you would yourself have cut as bad a figure on horseback as he does if you had had as little experience. My cousin only wants a little brushing up."

"Well," said Harry, "no amount of brushing up will ever induce me to lend him my horse to hunt with another time."

"And you may be quite sure he won't ask you for it," said Juliana haughtily. "I shall tell him to bring his own horse when he visits us again !"

"What, is he coming again ?" exclaimed Harry. "Well, Miss Marchmont, you have more patience than I gave you credit for having. If that fellow were to be put upon me for half a day I should have to take a dose of laudanum by way of a soporific."

"A book would answer the purpose equally well," said Juliana ironically ; so if chance should ever again throw you in the way of my cousin you have only to take up Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall,' or the 'Anatomy of Melancholy,' and you are safe to go to sleep without the help of laudanum."

We must now return to Samson who was not feeling in a particularly happy frame of mind as he turned his steps

towards the Hall. However, he had not gone very far before an unlucky cat chanced to cross his path. By way probably of convincing himself that he was still a man of spirit, in spite of sundry untoward circumstances, he at once put a considerable amount of energy into the pelting of the unfortunate creature, and the momentary excitement had on him an exhilarating effect. It happened, though, that no other animal was considerate enough to present itself for the purpose of being hunted by a man of spirit, and Samson soon began to find the walk along the high-road insufferably tiring and monotonous. But fortune favours the brave and so, just in the nick of time, our hero fell in with a bagman who was driving himself in a light spring cart, and who was at once hailed by our tired pedestrian. With the bribe, too, of a five-shilling piece the traveller was easily persuaded to give Sir James's discomfited heir a lift as far as the gates of the avenue, up which he walked with the air of a man who was feeling happy in the recent performance of a disinterested act.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Lady Marchmont as he entered the drawing-room; "whatever is the matter?"

"Oh nothing," replied Samson with assumed nonchalance; "but there was a young fellow we met, a friend of Mr. Harewood's, who was so disappointed at not being of the hunting-party that I thought it would be only kind to let him have the horse which had been lent to me. Besides it seemed hardly fair that we should all desert you this morn-

ing ; and now I shall be very happy to be at your service for the rest of the day."

Lady Marchmont gave her guest a well-bred smile, while she inwardly wished he had not been quite so accommodating. How to dispose of this considerate friend, who had retired from the chase for her especial benefit, was indeed a thought that occasioned her some perplexity. There was no horse in the stable except a lame one. Lady Marchmont had had her morning's walk, and Samson politely declined her proposal that he should take a constitutional on his own account. There was nothing for it but to resign herself to her fate. Our hero proved himself a faithful squire, and most assiduously did he apply himself to the task of amusing and instructing her. However, conversation in spite of his efforts soon began to flag, and Samson who was always fertile in expedients, now hit upon what he considered to be a very happy one for the further entertainment of his hostess.

In his school days it had been a custom that at the end of each half the parents of the boys should assemble for the purpose of hearing their sons recite poetry. Mrs. Marchmont had on these occasions always persistently declared that Samson's performance out-topped that of any of his school-fellows ; indeed so highly was it esteemed by her that at their annual Christmas party a rehearsal of it formed a very prominent part of the evening's amusement, and though James Marchmont's private opinion always had been that these little

entertainments would have gone off better without such prominent help from his son, yet he had never ventured on saying as much. He had, though, on one occasion hinted that the boy would do better if he would refrain from wasting his energies on such unmeaning action, and that his recitations would appeal more to the feelings of his auditors if he could throw himself a little into the spirit of the author, and put aside the wish to be himself the sole hero of the piece. This hint, however, had no other effect than that of bringing down on the worthy man the vehement indignation of his wife, who angrily asserted that all the dear child's dawning genius would too surely be crippled by such unjust and cruel criticism. With her son's acting therefore, as well as with other things, it was the unreasonable woman who gained the day; and James Marchmont, feeling himself vanquished, again yielded quietly to the powerful force which under the garb of folly had set in against him.

Fortified with the recollection of his mother's unlimited commendations, and spurred on by his keen desire to mix in the fashionable amusements of the day, Samson was at present occupied with the idea of offering his services in some private theatricals, and he was glad of an opportunity of testing his powers. He had been at some pains in getting up *Othello*, and he now proposed giving her Ladyship the benefit of his labours. The offer was somewhat listlessly accepted, and *Othello* was read. Samson was politely

thanked, too, when the performance was ended, and no expression of discontent was heard. However, as his auditress had always been a frequenter of the theatres, it is more than probable that her Ladyship did not hold his way of reading in the same estimation as did his mother.

Samson had commenced a criticism on the play which he had borrowed from Johnson, when the sound of horse's hoofs betokened the return of the hunting party. Lady Marchmont had been expecting her daughters for the last hour or two, and she was thoroughly out of temper when they arrived. Samson had at once left the drawing-room for the purpose of helping his cousins to dismount, and of then having a talk with the groom respecting the merits of the two horses. Her Ladyship was thus afforded a favourable opportunity of venting her ill-humour on her eldest daughter.

"Well, Juliana," she exclaimed sharply as that young lady entered the room, "I daresay it has been very amusing to you scampering over the country during the last eight hours, but mind another time when guests are invited here at your request, I shall expect you to entertain them yourself."

"Why, mamma," was the reply, "it was you know with your own full consent that Georgie and I left you to day, and so I cannot see that you are now justified in blaming me as you do."

This was said in anything but a pacificatory tone, and it had not in consequence a pacifying effect.

"I always mean to be mistress in my own house," said her ladyship authoritatively, "and when I think fit to find fault I don't expect to be answered by you. Now silence—"

Lady Marchmont perceived an inclination on the part of her daughter to have the last word if she could. Then taking out her watch, "How late you are?" she went on peevishly. "Go up stairs at once, and get ready for dinner."

As she spoke she gave her daughter a look implying that she meant to be obeyed, and Juliana retired.

The latter thought, as she ascended the stair, that any change would be preferable to such slavery as this, even though it were to involve an indissoluble union with her stupid, under-bred cousin. He might after all, with the help of a little instruction, soon be rendered passable, and she determined on devoting herself to the task of educating him. She felt too that as his visit was only to be of a week's duration, no time should be lost in the attempt.

"You should take some lessons in riding," she said, good humouredly that same evening, as soon as she had an opportunity of speaking to him unheard by her mother.

"I fully intend doing so," was the reply. "I can manage very well in town, but I find riding in the country such a totally different thing that I hardly know what I am about."

"What a pity you did not bring your own horse with you," said Juliana pleasantly. "Now, supposing you were to

hire one of Hardmann's at Barking for the rest of the time you are here? He has, I know, a beautiful chesnut, and if it is at home we might have some capital rides together, and it would accustom you to a scamper over the turf."

Samson eagerly fell in with the notion, and before retiring to rest Juliana wrote to this same Hardmann, she then gave the note to her maid with an injunction that it was to be sent off by one of the school-children the first thing in the morning. On the afternoon of the same day the chesnut made its appearance, and Samson received from his cousin his lesson in horsemanship. He proved, at all events, an attentive pupil, and so far satisfied his teacher that she now gave herself up, heart and soul, to the task of initiating him in the ways of society. By means too of badinage and clever little hints she got him on so far that when his visit was ended Lady Marchmont herself admitted that he was vastly improved by it.

CHAPTER XXX.

VAULTING AMBITION.

Lady Marchmont had a sister living in the fashionable world of London, and it had been found a convenient arrangement that the family from Granby Hall should visit her for a couple of months during the season. In return for this hospitality Mrs. Gaystone and her daughters had always spent a portion of the autumn or of the winter months at the Hall, for the purpose of recruiting their health, and of joining in the sports and amusements of the neighbourhood. Lady Marchmont had felt some scruples with regard to paying her accustomed visit this season to so professedly gay a house; however, her objections had been overruled. She was assured that a change was essential to her health, and she was not unwilling to believe the assertion: so, early in the month of May, the party from Granby Hall found themselves established in Mrs. Gaystone's fine house in Grosvenor Square.

This visit afforded Juliana a grand opportunity of bringing her cousin into good society. Mrs. Gaystone had married all her own daughters, and now she would have been very

happy to have helped her sister off with hers. She was therefore delighted to get any young man of expectations as a visitor, and Samson was given a general invitation to come when he pleased. His gratitude to his cousin seemed, in consequence, to be unbounded, and he was entirely at her service for rides or walks or what she pleased. It began therefore to be looked upon as a settled thing that Lady Marchmont's eldest daughter was eventually to occupy the position she had herself hitherto held at the Hall, and no one entertained a doubt but that the young people would come to an understanding before the London visit had terminated. Samson had, as we have said before, rapidly profited by his cousin's instructions, and having attained a certain amount of the superficial manners of the world, Lady Marchmont had decided that the marriage was one of which her daughter would not have positively to feel ashamed.

Towards the end of the Marchmont's visit their hostess gave a grand ball, and Samson of course was there. Amongst Mrs. Gaystone's guests were the Earl of Gosset and his three daughters, the Ladies Angelina, Caroline, and Matilda Peckham. The two elder ones had been to a good many balls and parties already, but their father, who had little to endow them with, had not yet succeeded in getting them off his hands. They knew all about Samson Marchmont and of his father's successful speculation, which report said was likely

to bring him in a mine of wealth. They decided therefore that Samson himself would be a sufficiently good speculation for themselves. It was the Lady Angelina who showed most especial willingness to dance with him, and on his handing her to her carriage she got her father to invite him to a dinner-party at their own house on the following day. Samson fancied himself grown some inches taller while receiving and accepting the invitation. The next morning he was in Grosvenor Square at an unusually early hour. It had been arranged that he was to lunch there at one, and afterwards to accompany his cousins to a flower-show.

It was now barely twelve, and Mrs. Gaystone who was in the drawing-room when he entered, at once prognosticated favourably from his early appearance, and gave him in consequence a particularly friendly reception. He must, she thought, have some special object in coming a full hour before he was expected. No doubt the proposal was just now on his lips.

“I have some letters to write,” she said in a tone of familiarity, as she rose to leave the room, “and I may not therefore see you again before the evening. You will of course come and dine with us. The girls are going to the Opera this last evening, and they will be glad of your escort. I am tired myself, and shall prefer spending a quiet evening with Lady Marchmont.”

“I have an engagement for this evening at the Earl of

Gosset's," was Samson's reply, his voice and manner betraying the pride he felt in making the announcement. "I am afraid too," he added, "I must pay you rather a hurried visit this morning," and he advanced for the purpose of taking leave.

"But you are going with them to the flower-show, are you not?" said Mrs. Gaystone, her tone and manner expressing great surprise.

"I—I am afraid I must give that up," said Samson, getting a little flurried. "I have an important engagement."

"What important engagement can you have got?" inquired Juliana somewhat haughtily.

She had taken her cousin so entirely under her pupilage, that she thought it only her due that he should inform her of all his arrangements.

Samson got fairly annoyed. He considered that Juliana was taking a great deal too much upon herself in thus bringing him to book. He must let her see that he would keep his own counsel whenever he thought fit. Such being his determination, we must ourselves enlighten our readers as to the intentions of this young eligible. Lady Angelina had told him the previous night that she and her party intended on the following day to be at the grand review in Hyde Park, at which her father would be the officer in command. She had also hinted that she would like to meet him there. Such a hint, coming from an Earl's daughter, was, in Samson's

opinion, equal to a command, and so to the review he was bent on going. He did not think he had made any positive promise to his cousins with regard to the flower-show. At all events he would, as he supposed, easily get out of the difficulty by bewailing his disappointment at being so unavoidably hindered from accompanying them. This close questioning he had not in the least anticipated, and he resolved on meeting it with silent contempt. Turning his back therefore on his former ally he addressed himself solely to the lady of the house.

"I should, I assure you," he said, "have been most happy to join your party but—"

"But you don't want to! Is that it, Mr. Marchmont?"

"Certainly not," replied Samson, who had no intention of discontinuing his visits at so good a house as Mrs. Gaystone's. "I *had* made an engagement," he went on, "but I feel sorely tempted to prove false to it for once."

"I should have thought your engagement to us had been prior to any other," said Mrs. Gaystone haughtily.

"Then I shall be delighted to keep to it," said Samson, now getting fairly terrified at the sparks of anger that shot from the eyes of his usually courteous and agreeable hostess. "I think," he went on, "you start at two? I must go and make my excuses to my friend. The fact is I had entirely forgotten, when we were talking about the flower-show yesterday, a previous engagement that I had made with him."

"And pray who is this friend of yours?" inquired Juliana.

"Who is he? Why—why—Thomas Dobbs."

Now Thomas Dobbs was a man who by industry and good conduct had risen quite from the lower classes, and of all his father's familiars he was the one whom Samson most cordially despised. The mere name of Dobbs would hardly have been mentioned by our hero in the presence of ears polite, were it not that his self-possession had for the moment forsaken him. Mr. Dobbs had that very morning been breakfasting in Montague Square by invitation from Sir James, who wished to have a talk with him about some charitable work in which they were both interested. The worthy man had, before leaving, expressed a wish that he might see some of the party at the meeting which was to be held that day in furtherance of the charitable object—a wish which our hero had never had a thought of gratifying. Just now, however, Samson felt like a culprit, anxious to repel any insinuation that might be flung at him respecting his own very vaulting ambition. Dobbs therefore was the only name which by way of exculpation, and in the hurry of the moment, the future Baronet could manage to get hold of.

"And pray who is this Mr. Dobbs?" inquired Juliana in a slightly supercilious tone.

"Oh, he's one of those awfully good people who are

always dunning you for money in some way or other. It was I fancy some missionary meeting that he wanted us all to attend. But I must be off at once. I shall be here again before two."

Suiting the action to the word Samson at once disappeared, leaving behind him an impression that his story about a previous engagement was false from beginning to end. Had Mrs. Gaystone set a spy upon his movements he would have been discovered wending his steps towards the hair-dresser's shop then most in vogue. Our hero deemed it essential that he should have his hair cut and put into order before dining with an Earl, and, as he did not know how long the *fête* was likely to last, he thought he had better make sure of getting through such an important operation beforehand. He had not taken into account the certainty that Juliana's lynx eyes would at once discover the metamorphosis which a visit of this kind so generally produces on mankind. She was, in fact, little disposed to spare him, finding, as she now did, that all her trouble had been fruitless as far as she was concerned, and that she had probably been merely helping her cousin to grow more vaulting in his ambition as regarded the choice of a wife. Indeed the whole party were out of humour with our hero, who neither enjoyed their company nor the *fête* to which he had found himself compelled to escort them.

The Earl's dinner was on the contrary the most delightful

thing he had ever been at. He had the honour of taking in the Lady Angelina, and he received besides a promise from the Countess that she would get him an invitation to the Duke of Magnum's ball. What young man, fresh from a merchant's office, and blessed with a silly and ambitious mother, could escape having his head turned by such condescension? Decidedly it was too much for our hero. It was late when he returned home, nevertheless his mother was up to receive him, and was all eagerness to get from him an exact account of everything. She was intending to give a dinner-party herself, and her ambition was that her's should be the exact counterpart of the Earl's. On his entering the room,

"Well, Samson," she exclaimed as she put down her embroidery, and, looking proudly at her son, rose to give him a maternal kiss, "how have you enjoyed yourself?"

"Oh, gloriously," was the reply. "We had such a splendid dinner, and—"

"What did you have?" was the eager rejoinder.

Samson did his best to explain, but he made rather a jumble of the dishes. However he was able to inform his mother of a few leading facts by which she considered herself to be materially benefited. The company, the dresses, and the conversation were next brought under review. Samson declared that he had never known what real high-breeding meant till now. He was enchanted with the easy affability

of the Earl and Countess, and with that of the daughters besides. Their behaviour towards him had indeed contrasted strikingly with that which he had experienced in the morning from Mrs. Gaystone and his cousins the Marchmonts. But then Mrs. Gaystone, though she did entertain lords and ladies at her house, was not herself a member of the aristocracy, and in this way her want of politeness might be accounted for. As to his cousins he considered them to be merely country-bred lasses, and indeed he feared he might be tempted to feel a little ashamed of them were he at any future period to meet them among the really higher circles.

“What a pity it is,” he exclaimed as a wind up to his oration, “that father will insist on keeping on with those vulgar people, the Cooks and the Smiths, and with Thomas Dobbs too, who is in my opinion the worst of the whole lump. These great folks don’t like coming in the way of the common herd, and I am afraid they may get a little shy of us if they find out that we have such plebeian blood continually about us.”

“Oh!” said Lady Marchmont with a deep sigh, “it is, you know, of no use reasoning with your father. I have taken trouble enough with him before now; but a man of his age and with such confined views is not likely to improve as he grows older.”

“Well,” said Samson by way of parting words as he took

up his bed candlestick, “it will be as well to explain to people how eccentric father is, and to let it be fully understood that we none of us appreciate his taste in the choice of his friends.”

We cannot say for a certainty whether Lady Marchmont acted by her son’s advice. Perhaps she did—at least it is very certain that in spite of the Cooks, and the Smiths, and of Thomas Dobbs to boot, there soon was a free interchange of visits between the Earl’s family and that of the Baronet. Indeed so rapidly did this intimacy progress that in the course of the autumn there was a grand announcement in the *Times* of a marriage in high life. Mr. Marchmont, the eldest son of Sir James, had led to the Hymenean altar Lady Angelina, the eldest daughter of the Earl of Gosset. The happy pair had gone at once to his Lordship’s beautiful seat, Peckham Park, in Leicestershire, where they would probably remain during the hunting season.

There was a hearty laugh at Granby Hall over this announcement, Juliana hoping that her riding lessons might prove of some use to her cousin, and that they would save him from getting his neck broken the first time he attempted a leap over a five-barr’d gate.





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